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THE DIDACTIC ELEMENT IN THE POETRY OF TENNYSON

by

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THE DIDACTIC ELEMENT IN THE POETRY OF TENNYSON

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Tennyson is pre-eminently a poet with a message. His contemporaries, as a rule, regarded this aspect of his work with favor. A notable exception was Frederick Harrison who deplored the uncritical adulation bestowed upon the poet. "The people, the critics, the poets continue with one voice to cry, 'Splendid is the flower!' He has been like 'Mr. Pope' or 'the Doctor" invested with a conventional autocracy and is spoken of in the language of homage under pain of some form of lese-majesty." Harrison prefaced his own frank judgments with, "It is unworthy of him and of ourselves to exalt him to a superhuman pedestal where it is accounted profanity to hint at a weakness or fault." He proceeded with an impartial estimate in which he commented unfavorably on the polemical turn of mind which he believed grew upon Tennyson in his later years. "He wrote several pieces the substantial argument of which did not rise above the level of the popular sermons, essays, or novels which confute modern philosophy and science." Of the Idylls of the King he ob-

served: "And so the whole fierce lusty epic gets emasculated into a moral lesson as if it were to be performed in a drawing-room by an academy of young ladies."1

Since Tennyson's death estimates of his art not infrequently take the tone of Frederick Harrison. It is felt by a number of critics that the poet in Tennyson was handicapped by the preacher. His didacticism is referred to as an unfortunate literary tendency. Hugh Walker believes that the didactic element is traceable in nearly all his work after the death of Hallam.[2] A.C.Benson says of the Idylls of the King, The Princess, the dramas, and later poems: "He was drawn aside from his real path by the pressure of public expectation, by social influence, by the noble desire to modify and direct thought."[3] Of the Idylls of the King H.C.Grierson says: "It was indeed a misfortune that Tennyson was determined to tie the tin kettle of didactic intention to the tail of all poems of this period."[4] And again he ventures the opinion that "the Idylls of the King, the most popular of all his works when they appeared, is today

1 Tennyson, Ruskin, and Mill, 1900, pp.14-18. The homage referred to and the belief that Tennyson should have a message are apparent in the letters and conversations scattered through the Memoir of the poet written by his son. The admiration of such men as Tyndall, Jowett, Palgrave, and Gladstone takes the tone of a tribute to Tennyson either as a thinker or as a teacher of his age. Froude, too, has this, which is typical: "He speaks the thoughts and speaks to the perplexities and misgivings of his own age." Memoir, Vol.II, p.468. Harold Nicolson states that after 1850 the critics continued to talk of Tennyson's "mission" for forty-two years. Tennyson, Aspects of His Life, Character, and Poetry, 1923, p.155.

2 Literature of the Victorian Era, New York, 1922, p.387.

3 Alfred Tennyson, New York, 1907, p.214.

4 "The Tennysons," Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol.XIII, p.41.

the chief stumbling-block to a young student of Tennyson. Its Parnassian beauties,its vaguely religious and somewhat timid morality reflect too vividly the spirit of their own day."[1]

More recent criticism continues in the same vein. The following represents the verdict of Hugh I.Fausset: "Tennyson was induced by popular clamor to desert the universe of passion for the province of platitude."[2] Harold Nicolson predicts that if Tennyson's poetry survive,it will do so "in spite of the instructional and objective tenour which was forced upon it by the Victorians. Throughout his life and writings we can trace his sensitive poetic temperament struggling against the "mission" and 'message' imposed upon it by the circumstances of his age."[3]

In spite of these comments on the didactic element in the poetry of Tennyson, no study of this phase of his work has yet been made. But such a study will be valuable in view of the age-long problems centering in the relation of truth and morality to art. Such an investigation ought to be a demonstration in the concrete which would,at least, mark out possibilities and limitations. Tennyson is a remarkably good subject for such a study. An artist by nature,he had both the artist's vision and his impulse for craftsmanship. These two,creativity and technique,were undoubtedly modified by the aim to teach which was a prevailing spirit in an age of intense intellectual excitement. No poet could be chosen in whom the impact of two seem-

1 Grierson,op.cit.,p.42
2 Tennyson,New York,1923,p.100.
3 Tennyson Aspects of His Life Character and Poetry, Boston,1923,p.16.

ingly hostile impulses will be more instructive, whose product will throw more light on the relation of the intellectual experience to the aesthetic. In addition, Tennyson lived in an age when the moral aim in letters reached a climax and was in part superseded by the extremes of the school whose slogan was "art for art's sake." Hence a study of the didactic element in his poetry should have critical value as throwing light on the literary creeds and methods of his day.

There are indications that the hostility toward Tennyson has reached the peak and may now begin to decline.[1] A Tennyson revival is not beyond the pale of possibility. The latter might represent as "blind a tide of opinion" as his unpopularity. Wherein does the truth lie? A re-examination of his total output at this time is opportune.

Since the investigation is critical as well as factual, conclusions must be drawn with caution. There must be no disputing concerning matters of taste. Nevertheless, by establishing criteria on which to base judgment, it will be possible to discover an irreducible minimum of didacticism which, once pointed out, would be generally admitted to exist.

1 Tennyson has been defended by Dean Inge in The Victorian Age, 1922, by Chesterton in Essays in Diversity, 1921, and by Alfred Noyes in Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, 1924.

CHAPTER TWO

DEFINITIONS

I

The year 1557 saw the publication of two volumes of English poetry which were in marked contrast as to spirit and content. Tottel's Miscellany, according to the sub-title was "a book of songs and sonnettes." Tusser's Five Hundreth points of Good Husbandrie was an agricultural treatise in verse. Only the enthusiasm of youth and a vein of genuine feeling saved the former from virtuosity.[1] The latter was sugar-coated information self-confessed. Each had its roots in the past. That the two books should have appeared when English literature, having passed through its apprenticeship, was about to enter upon a period of extroardinary creative activity, is significant. It means that the impulse to sing and the impulse to instruct had that inherent vitality which sought and found models in the past and which by the same token would furnish models for the future. That instruction should put on the dress of song points to a basic confusion of function or to the persistence of some primitive need. The two books may

1 Tottel's Miscellany is not free from ideas, a favorite theme being the evils of court life as contrasted with the blessings of retirement. But these poems are in the minority and are pursued in the experimental, imitative spirit of young artists.

be taken as representative of the extreme right and left of practice in the use of the intellectual element in poetry. Between these two extremes we have had every variety of instruction and all the fine shades of song; and from the marriage of the two have issued hybrid forms which have worked confusion among out neat classifications and evoked persistent controversies.

Profitable or otherwise,these controversies were inevitable since the mind of man is throwing off products which he, himself does not understand. In this matter of the relation between ideas and poetry, the problems are so intricate and perplexing that the truth seems to lie now here now there. To take a stand concerning divergences of view which have lasted more than two thousand years seems a bit dogmatic.

Yet one must have a credo--that is,if one does not cease to think. This is especially imperative for those who investigate a subject which calls for the use of critical terms. Thus, to undertake a study of the didacticism of Tennyson is to be confronted at the outset by the perennial questions,What is art? What is poetry? What is the relation of truth to art? Of science,of morality,of religion? Subsidiary questions arise. What What is the relation of philosophy to poetry? Where do we put epigram and the gnomic? The nature of wit and humor contributes a share to these perplexities,for we must draw the line between the sententious and true wit. Above all.we must decide what to do with Pope and verse-satire in general. It is clear that one must have a literary platform; the more so that

the term didactic, itself, has had its period of good and its period of ill repute. It will be necessary, therefore, to define the word as it will be used in this thesis. This in turn must be based on a working definition of poetry and as clear as may be a distinction as to when it may teach and when it may not.

For this undertaking we have the advantage of all preceding efforts to deal with the problem. Since the time of Aristotle the nature and attributes of poetry have been the subject of glowing praise and keen analysis by scholars, poets, and philosophers. The results of their thinking are before us. It will be the part of wisdom to begin where they leave off rather than to set out upon a new path. To do so will involve a selective evaluation particularly among those definitions which really define. It will involve taking a strong position on such aspects of the problem as have awakened controversy. In the latter case it will be better to be dogmatic than hazy and vacillating. Better a little presumption here than poverty of conviction. There is an apparent liberalism in defining which takes pride in inclusiveness; it shuns drawing the line. According to this view to recognize likenesses and identity is to harmonize by positive relations, to make for the breadth, richness and complexity of things. Something is to be said for this method. In the matter of the difference between prose and poetry, for instance, the method of inclusiveness avoids the danger of limiting too narrowly the function of prose as Pater has pointed out. But just as certainly does it blur the edges of our

conception of poetry. Consequently Pater is more emphatic about the dangers of the method:

> Since all progress of mind consists for the most part in differentiation, in the resolution of an obscure and complex subject into its component aspects, it is surely the stupidest of losses to confuse things which right reason has put asunder, to lose the sense of achieved distinctions.[1]

And among the distinctions which he wishes tp preserve is that of the difference between prose and poetry. As a matter of fact, if we come down from the aloof and windy peaks of theory, we cannot fail to see that right reason has put the two asunder. There is song, and there is talk. Just so there is poetry and there is prose. A man sits at his desk thinking of various matters relating to business, domestic affairs, public life. After a time he rises and walks away humming a tune. Now the second mood is decidedly different from the first. Something has clicked in his mental machinery and put him in another sphere. He has pressed a button and switched on a new attitude which calls for a new vocabulary and a new tempo. The essence of the new mode consists of melody and meter. In this realm he can sing what he dare not say. Melody and meter serve as a disguise under cover of which the less familiar aspect of the ego may come into activity. It is the lifted mood of song.

This illustration will serve to indicate the guiding principles in the following definitions; to avoid refining in such matters as can be settled by an appeal to right rea-

1 Walter Pater, Selections from Pater, ed. Ada L.F. Snell, New York, 1924, p. 86.

son and to differentiate sharply, to be mindful of separateness and unlikeness.

II

Of the nineteen definitions given by Raymond M. Alden in his Introduction to Poetry,[1] those by Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, Macaulay, Hazlitt, Shelley, Wordsworth, Emerson, and Ruskin are in reality definitions of belles lettres, applying as well to such prose as that of Jeremy Taylor, Newman, Carlyle, Lafcadio Hearn, Ruskin, and De Quincey as to poetry. Ruskin's descriptive definition is typical of this loose mode: "Poetry is the suggestion by the imagination of noble grounds for noble emotions. I mean by the noble emotions, those four principal sacred passions--Love, Veneration, Admiration, and Joy...and their opposites--Hatred, Indignation (or scorn), Horror, and Grief." What is there in this definition which does not apply to the whole field of what De Quincey called the literature of power as distinct from the literature of knowledge? Indeed, these are the very passions appealed to by prose fiction, which is also imaginative. The following by Macaulay: "By poetry we mean the art of applying words in such a manner as to produce an illusion on the imagination, the art of doing by means of words what the painter does by means of color," applies to descriptive prose whenever it can be called literature. We come upon such passages frequently in the novels of George Eliot, Conrad,

1 Raymond M. Alden, Introduction to Poetry, New York, 1926, pp. 1-4.

Hardy,W.H.Hudson,and many others. Wordsworth's dictum, "Poetry is the image of man and nature," applies as well to the plays of Ibsen as to those of Shakespeare. That other famous description of poetry by Wordsworth,"Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling:it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility," is more satisfactory as to the content and creation of poetry,but it gives no hint of form. Here again we can easily think of prose to which it applies; for example,Lamb's "Dream-Children," Pater's "The Child in the House." In much the same manner other definition's in Alden's list apply equally to literary prose and to poetry. Definitions by Carlyle,Poe,Stedman,and Watts-Dunton are more satisfactory because they insist on rhythmical or musical language. Nevertheless,their definitions must be rejected as lacking in precision,for prose may also be musical and rhythmical. W.G.Courthope goes a step further: "By poetry I mean the art of producing pleasure by the just expression of imaginative thought and feeling in metrical language." Alden also makes metrical language a requirement. This is a step forward. But whereas the other definitions are too loose,these are too restricted. If we require meter,we shall have to exclude free verse,the poetry of Whitman,Tagore,and the King James Version. Of these we may well ask,"If not poetry,then what are they to be called? It is plain that our definition must include both rhythmical and metrical language. Here we have recourse to the definition of C.M.Gayley: "Poetry may be defined as the emotive and imaginative expression

or suggestion of that which has significance, in the rhythmical and preferably metrical medium of language appropriate to the subject." A new trouble is now apparent. If we exclude the word rhythmical, our definition does not include enough; if we include it, we open the door to impassioned prose. In fact, John L. Lowes has shown that the prose of Pater Conrad, Fiona McCleod, and Maurice Hewlitt, if suitably lined out is nobly rhythmic; many passages even have the strophic return of free verse. He goes still further and finds no difference between the unrhymed cadences of free verse and the unrhymed cadences of certain modern rhythmic prose. But this, he goes on to say, is not an assertion that the prose passages are identical with poetry. For--and here we have the answer to the whole difficulty--"There are differences which set the one off from the other. The prose from which I have culled my excerpts does not maintain unbrokenly the rhythms which I have shown it to possess. If it did, we should certainly hesitate to call it prose. The best free verse poems, on the other hand, do maintain these rhythms consistently. And that is an important difference; the rhythms which are occasional in the one, are persistent in the other. Moreover, in prose like Meredith's and Conrad's and Pater's and Hewlitt's, the strophic element, the quality of return, although it is frequently present... is also not uniform. If it recurred with any regularity, the prose would at once become bad prose."[1] Free verse, he declares "deals

1 Convention and Revolt in Poetry, New York, 1926, pp. 273-275.

with prose rhythms in a fashion which prose itself cannot employ without ceasing to be prose."[1]

Here at last is the differentia we need for distinguishing sharply between prose and poetry. Seeking from all the definitions here considered a simplification that will not sacrifice any essential, we have: Poetry is the artistic expression of the human mind in metrical language or in language which has a sustained rhythmic pattern. This definition may seem to beg the question by the use of the word artistic. In reality it does not do so. For art, as Havelock Ellis has pointed out, is an ultimate like consciousness or love. It is not necessary at this point to go into an elaborate discussion of the nature of art.[2] The matter for the present may be put very simply. Art is something shaped by man into satisfying form from a preconceived design. In the fine arts this something and its fit design have to do with beauty; in its creation the artist is free from utilitarian aims.

1 Lowes, op.cit., pp.278-280.
2 The Dance of Life, New York, 1929, p.296. "Another question that might be put is easy to deal with summarily: What is Art? We may deal with it summarily because it is an ultimate question. As soon as we begin to ask such questions, as soon as we begin to look at any phenomenon as an end in itself, we are on the perilous slopes of metaphysics where no agreement can or should be possible." Again he says, "There is no defining art; there is only the attempt to distinguish between good art and bad art." p.298. Cf. Goethe in Conversations with Eckermann, pp. 196-197. "I cannot help laughing...at the aesthetical folks who torment themselves in endeavoring by some abstract words to reduce to a conception that inexpressible thing to which we give the name of beauty. Beauty is a primeval phenomenon, which itself never makes its appearance, but the reflection of which is visible in a thousand different utterances of the creative mind and is as various as nature herself."

III

The classification of poetry by the ancients as epic, dramatic, and lyric, has apparently stood the test of time. If the terminology of criticism may be taken as a guide, the division seems to correspond loosely to the facts. It seems to exhaust the forms of poetry if we consider the relation of the poet to his material.[1] Whether it does actually exhaust these forms is a question.

Notwithstanding the fitness of the classification, it was inevitable that a fourth type, the didactic, should be added to the list. For the thing itself had been in existence since the dawn of Greek literature and found ample illustration among the Latin writers. In fact so early did it appear and so frequently was it known in European literature, that we are impelled to seek fundamental reasons for its existence. So much has been done by way of investigating the origins of poetry by such scholars as R.G.Moulton,[2] A.S.Mackenzie,[3] Karl Bucher[4] and F.B.Gummere,[5] that we may take it as accepted that two sources of poetry appeared in the remote beginnings. Dionysus and Apollo were both at work upon the heart of primitive man.

1 Considering the creating mind, Watts-Dunton's classification of poets as poets of energy and poets of art is helpful; likewise his division of poetic minds into those of egoistic imagination and those of dramatic imagination, the latter including only poets of first rank who have written the great epics and d: dramas. Poetry, Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh edition, Vol. XXI, pp.870ff.

2 World Literature, Macmillan, 1921.

3 The Evolution of Literature

4 Arbeit und Rhythmus, Berlin, 1889.

5 The Beginnings of Poetry, New York, 1901.

The relief of ecstasy in erotic dance or in the wild dithyrambs of the Bacchic festivals;likewise the song dance of individuals or of communal labor were on the side of art for art's sake. But the magic runes of the medicine man,the incantations of primitive people for the purpose of propitiating the gods or obtaining rewards,the utterances of the oracles,were clearly on the side of art for utility's sake. Just here began the prostitution of art to practical ends. And for it there were natural reasons. Early man expressed joy,sorrow, and anger in dance and song. How natural to feel that only such extreme excitation would move the gods. Hence the magic words and rhythm of the charm. When oral tradition began,a further practical use of verse was mnemonic. Next in the literary stage came the desire of the teacher to make instruction attractive. In all these phases the use of poetic form for practical ends had some justification in the fact that there was no medium of expression between talk and song--no adequate prose. Thus from natural causes arose the basic confusion as to the function of prose and that of poetry.which has persisted to this day. And this prostitution of the pure creative impulse to utilitarian purposes is the essence of didacticism.

Among the Greeks and Romans appeared five streams of didacticism which have for all time served as models in the literary world. Each of these types definitely aims to teach; each"approaches us with the arts and graces of the schoolmaster." An examination of these early forms and their influence will be the necessary preface to clarity of definition.

1. The Informational Didactic. The Theogony of Hesiod was neither song, drama, nor story, but, being in verse, was accepted as poetry and became the repository of the Greek religion. The instruction in sheep-raising, harvesting, bee-keeping, and general farming of the Works and Days received the high flattery of imitation by no less a poet than Virgil, who in turn, by stamping the form with the imprint of his imaginative genius, gave it currency in the form of agricultural and pastoral eclogue in the literature of Europe for more than a thousand years. But never again was it to be practiced by so gifted an artist. Other manifestations of the informational didactic, treatises on medicine and astronomy, appeared as early as the sixth century B.C. and as late as the fourth century A.D. The seed thus sown had disastrous consequences in European literature. In English literature the agricultural didactic poem appeared as late as the eighteenth century, finally destroying itself in the absurdities of The Fleece[1] and The Sugar Cane.[2] With Hesiod and other early forms of the didactic, the purpose may have been mnemonic. Later developments aimed to make fact acceptable by the aid of verse. This type of didactic is now obsolete.

2. The Rhetorical Didactic. This form is best represented by the Ars Poetica of Horace. It culminated in the verse criticism of Boileau and Pope. It owed its existence to the

1 John Dyer(1700-1758), The Fleece, 1757.
2 James Grainger(1721-1766), The Sugar Cane, 1764.

fact that interest in the laws of style was contemporaneous with an age when poetry was a popular vehicle for truth. It is probably obsolete.

3. The Satirical Didactic. The incipient stage of this type may have been the personal abuse of Homer's Thersites;[1] especially in the comment of Ulysses on the character of Thersites is something which sounds exceedingly like John Dryden. Probably contemporaneous were the beast stories attributed to Aesop which were soon discovered to be admirably adapted to satirical purposes. When the lampooning of individuals shall be accompanied by wit,fancy,or ethical import as an instrument of reform,we shall have literary satire. This came with Archilochus,Simonides,and Hipponax in the sixth and seventh centuries,B.C. As to literary content satire received not a little impetus from Greek comedy,Aristophanes,in particular uniting the satirical vein with great poetic gifts. These variations

[1] Thersites,only clamored in the throng,
Loquacious,loud,and turbulent of tongue:
Awed by no shame,by no respect controlled,
In scandal busy,in reproaches bold;
With witty malice,studious to defame,
Scorn,all his joy,and laughter all his aim;
But chief he gloried with licentious style
To lash the great and monarchs to revile.
His figure such as might his soul proclaim,
One eye was blinking,and one leg was lame;
His mountain shoulders half his breast o'erspread,
Thin hairs bestrewed his long misshapen head.
Spleen to mankind his envious heart possessed,
And much he hated all,and most the best.
Ulysses or Achilles still his theme,
But royal scandal all his delight supreme.
Long had he lived,the scorn of every Greek,
Vexed when he spoke,yet still they heard him speak.
The Iliad,tr.Alexander Pope,Bk.II,p.77.

have been the molds which have shaped European satire, proceeding through various gradations from Aesop to Reynard the Fox and Mother Hubbard's Tale; from Aristophanes to Moliere and Dryden; from Archilochus through Lucilius, Horace, Martial, Juvenal, and thence to Pope. This manifestation of the didactic in poetry has had a longer life than the informational and hase elements of permanence. In fact the vitality of satire is proved by its diffusion in many forms of literature today. In its purity as a type of poetry, it may never again reach the height of the Latin satires or those of Moliere, Dryden, and Pope.

4 The Philosophical Didactic. The Greek antecedents for this type date from poems on natural phenomena such as the Fragments of Parmenides and Empedocles who in turn influenced Lucretius, the greatest of all didactic poets. The author of De Rerum Natura has not had a successor. In the dawn of philosophical thought ideas found expression in the cryptic and symbolic. Not only this, but speculative thought in this direction leads to the greatest themes; the nature of Deity, man and his destiny, the conduct of life. Moreover, in Lucretius other aspects of the didactic are manifest. His poem deals with informational matters of physics, psychology, and the history of civilization; he made use of the materials and expressions of the satires of Lucilius. In treating natural phenomena he was both ethical and speculative, the latter motive dominating.

5 The Allegorical Didactic. Allegory throughout the Middle Ages and in varying degrees of popularity through all subsequent time has been a vehicle for didactic poetry. If it did not

appear in Greek literature,it was implicit in the Greek way of seeing the world. The myths of forest,sea,and sky were the groping analogies by which they explained the universe and their own hearts. When the first poets and story tellers appeared,it was but a step from the veiled ethical purpose of the fable and the suggestive nature of myth and pastoral to allegory. This natural evolution was continued by the Latin writers of Christian hymns,and consummated in the Middle Ages through the bestiary,the morality play,the pastoral,and other forms of poetry.

Thus five modes of didactic poetry came to have their part in European literary tradition. Thus Apollo perpetuated his oracles. But it is now necessary to note two influences which accentuated a type of poetry which we have already found to have some basis in the nature of things; two impulses which began slowly and gathered momentum through the passing of time and the multiplication of examples until one phase of didacticism,the moral aim,came to have a strangle-hold on English literature. From two great sources it received the moral twist. First from Hellas. The Greeks cared for beauty and the free, wholesome play of the whole man. Their morality was touched with aesthetic feeling. The good life was the beautiful life. Immorality won their disapproval because it appeared ugly to them. The simplest way to put it is tosay that their morality was not the Hebraistic type which developed out of a minute

[1] The Psychomachia of Prudentius(348 A.D.),a long allegorical poem contrasting virtue and vice was imitated by church poets and had great influence on medieval literature.

code of specifications and prohibitions. The bent of Hellenism was rather "to follow with flexible activity the whole play of the universal order,to be apprehensive of missing any part of it,of sacrificing one part to another."[1] There is no mistaking the Greek predilection for this type of morality. But it must not be forgotten that they were moral. Plato's attitude in banishing the poets from his ideal state illustrates it. Aristotle while recognizing the function of poetry to give delight,could not help reverting to the view of his master. Plutarch whose influence on English literature was considerable, was incorrigibly moral. The moral import of the great tragedies is central and pervasive. Thus the conduct of life as a theme for literature was well launched in prose as well as in poetry by this gifted people who have been the prime movers in so many phases of Western thought.

The Hellenic influence toward didacticism was carried forward by the Romans. Horace must receive special mention in this connection because he represents four of the types just discussed,the informational,the satirical,the rhetorical,and the ethical. He believed that literature should instruct as well as delight. The poet,he thought,should not only give pleasure to the cultivated few,but should be"utilis urbi." "Horace is so much a moralist in all his writings that in order to enter into the spirit,both of his familiar and of

1Arnold,op.cit.,p.110.

his lyrical poetry,it is essential that we should realize to ourselves what were his views of life."[1] He taught the value of contentment,the dangers of luxury,ambition,and avarice. On occasion he attacked the ills of society,decrying above all things the pursuit of wealth. Not only is Horace important because of his poetic practice,but because of his influence. During the Renaissance he enjoyed a revival,being a poet of those few chosen spirits who have taste and know how to think. This usually narrows down to writers,especially poets. It is not that his writings were imitated--though they were--but the spirit in which he made poetry the vehicle of ethical teaching and the charm of his personality were such that the Horatian themes were widely imitated in the literature of Europe. Thus he furnished theory,practice,and themes calculated to disseminate the didactic manner in poetry. This received emphasis from the use of his poetry as a text in the schools, and from the fact that after the Renaissance,his literary theory as given in the Ars Poetica was accepted as widely as that of his master,Aristotle.

The second emphasizing influence was the Christian church. Matthew Arnold has pointed out that the English people were in reality Indo-European. This appears in their humor and in their ability to see steadily many aspects of life.[2] But by some inexplicable turn of mentality they were sympathetic toward the Hebraistic conception of morality and its preoccupation with

1 W.Y.Sellar,"Horace",Encyclopedia Britannica,Ninth Edition, Vol.XII,p.163ff.
2 Op.cit.,p.110.

the negative concept, sin, as distinct from the positive concept of the good life. This developed into the other-worldliness of the medieval ideal. The great Holy church colored every phase of thought, attaining so preponderating an influence that even Humanism was not able permanently to check it. For this reason the prevalence of allegory in medieval literature was due to the distrust of poetry because it is pleasant and beautiful. Poetry had to justify itself by giving a message in the guise of allegory.[1]

Thus we have in European literature a thorough-going bent for instructing in verse derived from the overshadowing influence of the ancients and emphasized by the Christian church. Five distinct types of didactic poetry have appeared as models for the future. It will be seen that the philosophical didactic has shown the most obstinate persistence. Here, therefore, will be the battleground of definition. All questions center in this type together with the allied forms, satire and allegory.

But it must not be forgotten that the pure artistic impulse lived, grew, and bore fruit in spite of these deviations. Dionysus could no more be dethroned than Apollo. It will be necessary to trace briefly the action and reaction between these apparently hostile tendencies. And the nature of didacticism is wrapped up in the problem of the relation between morality and art.

1 Thus medieval divines held that Vergil's Aeneid was an allegory of sacred things. Even in the nineteenth century the Song of Solomon was held to be an allegory of Christ and the Church.

IV

That the two streams of expression, art and morality, seem to be hostile is not due to any inherent antithesis between them but to the dual nature of man who has not yet been able to bring into harmony two aspects of his desires.[1] Art commends him to freedom, morality to discipline; art manifests the spiritual through the sensuous, morality through satisfying conduct and institutions made possible through restraint; art is an expression of the best in terms of beauty; morality is a repression of the worst at the command of duty; art is free, disinterested; morality, utilitarian. Moreover, the methods of the two seem to be in conflict. Art is implicit, suggestive; morality is explicit, mandatory; art is creative, morality adaptive. And the conflict which has lasted more than two thousand years consists of the swinging of the pendulum from one extreme to the other. Occasionally the two forces exist side by side. Occasionally they attain comparative equilibrium.

1 Nor is it desirable that the two should be brought into complete harmony. Freedom and restraint represent the normal polarity of life. Santayana believes that the relation between the moral and aesthetic judgments is close, but that the distinction between them is important: "One factor of this distinction is that while aesthetic judgments are mainly positive, that is, perceptions of good, moral judgments are mainly and fundamentally negative, or perceptions of evil... The truth is that morality is not mainly concerned with the attainment of pleasure; it is rather concerned in all its deeper and more authoritive maxims with the prevention of suffering." The Sense of Beauty, New York, 1896, pp. 23-24. The confusion, then, seems to be a confusion of function and product.

Among the Greeks of the age of Pericles there was comparative equilibrium between art and morality because of the aesthetic conception of morality. But when in a later age Greek art and letters leaned toward virtuosity and dilettantism,reaction set in. The Cynics and Stoics abjured the sensuous appeal of art and sought satisfaction for their hunger for the beautiful in the austere beauty of an almost ascetic morality. But always with the Greeks,the connection between beauty and the good life remained implicit. It never came to the surface of consciousness. It remained for the Alexandrian Plotinus to render the relation conscious,explicit. His influence,however,was in the direction of mystic contemplation rather than in that visible beauty which demands expression in works of art. The early Christians repressed the development of art,negatively through lack of interest in sensuous beauty, and positively through over-emphasis of the concept of sin and a morbid attention to the minutiae of conduct. They sought,therefore,forms of worship which shunned imagery,thinking it a barrier between the soul and God. But in spite of these limitations, early Christianity made two great contributions to the materials of art:the Scriptures and the personality of Jesus. The former with their passion and Oriental,imagery colored the poetry of the Western World; the figure of Jesus with its clear simplicity and its forbodings of tragedy which were almost Greek, but which had a suggestion of the infinite and a transfiguration of human existence of which the Greeks were incapable. The union of this ideal with the Neo-Platonism of Plotinus prepared the way for the spiritual art of the Middle Ages as

manifested in miracle play,chorale,religious painting, and Gothic architecture. Since the basis of art at this time is also the basis of morality,we should expect comparative equilibrium. But this magnificent artbimpulse was counterbalanced by the repressive influence of aseeticism and the intellectual excesses of theological controversy

With the Renaissance and Reformation we have a still more violent dualism. Here the conflicting tendencies exist side by side,but in EnglandbPuritanism fimally dominates. In the Enlightenment the pendulum swings to the extreme of intellectualiism and a narrow morality guided by reason. Reaction comes with the new Humanism of Germany. In spite of his categorical imperative,Kant was a liberal in his view of art,raising the beautiful beyond utility. Goethe,Lessing,and Schiller cultivated the Attic spirit,seeing in the universal order freedom, logic,goodness and beauty as parts of the whole. With Rousseau and Romanticism there is a new impulse toward fresh seeing and free expression of sensuous beauty,co-existent with the growing aspects of utilitarian democracy. The latter ideal together with a growing industrial civilization and the manysidedness of political thought and experiment reached a climax in the first half of the age of Tennyson. Morality as a motive in literature was at its highest point in human history. But already counter tendencies were at work,notably the Tractarian movement. Next came the Pre-Raphaelites and on the utmost bound of the pendulum,the Aesthetes. Here the notion of art for art's sake reached its climax. Of these movements the Tractarian

was most complex,the Pre-Raphaelite the most misunderstood.[1]

The movement whose slogan was "art for art's sake was a salutary revolt against the perversion of art through morality which came to a head in the"eighties and nineties" in European literature,particularly in that of Victorian England. The practice of Keats and the dictum of Poe[2] were supported by Beaudelaire,Flaubert,Verlaine,and the brothers,Goncourt,in France,and by Swinburne,Wilde,Symonds,and Whistler in England,to give only a few names. It received particular emphasis from later schools of Symbolists. Albert Mordell thus sums up the origin of the movement;

> In many respects the theory awakens sympathy in all lovers of literature;it was a reaction to the moralist view which wanted art to teach the commonplace ethical notions we know. Art has always had an enemy in the bourgeois moralist. He always looked for a sermon and stamped the artist as immoral who arrived at conclusions different from those countenanced by the church and State. He was not satisfied to read of a wonderful

1 Tractarianism was an off-shoot of the romantic ideal in so far as it is a longing for the beauty and mysticism of the medievalism of the Catholic Church. Quite another strain was its fear of German rationalism.

The code of the Pre-Raphaelites was simple enough;to study nature attentively,to sympathize with what is direct,serious,and heartfelt in previous works,to the exclusion of what is conventional,self-parading,and learned by rote,to produce thoroughly good pictures. This is in the direction of truth and exactness in art--good craftsmanship,in short. But when Rossetti's paintings took on what was called the "fleshly tone," the public ascribed this quality to the work of the whole brotherhood. But when Ruskin defended the school against the violent criticism evoked,he took occasion to impute to them his own ideas of morality in art. These two contrasting attributes clung to the name, and both can be traced in the writings of the Victorian poets.

2 "Unless incidentally,it [poetry] has no concern whatever either with Duty or with Truth." In "The Poetic Principle", Complete Works,Cameo Edition,1904,Vol.I,p.32.

portrayal of passion done as a lesson in psychology without any moral comments by the author. He wanted the artist to act like a preacher and condemn at all times instead of portray. The Puritan opposed the truthful description of natural emotions; he looked askance upon references to the body; he wanted people drawn in obedience to laws instead of breaking through them. He tried to thrust subjects on the artist and limit him. He had no ear for sound,no eye for color,no appreciation of beauty. Little wonder that the artist lost patience and sent morality to the devil, deified technique and deliberately chose unseemly subjects.[1]

All adherents of the new theory,though they differed in the degree of their ardor and the extremes to which they would go,agreed on certain principles: "that the subject matter and ideas of a work of art did not count,that the important thing was the execution,that art was not to be judged by any standards of morality."[2] Thus the theory was antagonistic to the introduction of ideas,humanitarian motives,the portrayal of life, and the analysis of emotions.

Although the movement was a much-needed liberalizing force in art,it was temporary. Before it spent its force,its adherents were drawn into such absurdities that the very term aesthete came to symbolize all that is effeminate and sterile. Its death warrant was signed when extremists eliminated the intellect. from art and sought an art which was unrelated to life. But above all,it was contrary to common sense. To deny the great place of ideas and morals in the works of Shakespeare,Goethe,Lucretius,the Hebrew prophets,and the Greek tragedians is manifestly absurd. Nor can we attribute the tendency to introduce mor-

1 The Literature of Ecstasy,New York,1921,p.139.
2 Ibid.,p.138.

ality and ideas into literature as a peculiar tendency of the English people although with them it may be very strong as Voltaire and Matthew Arnold believed. But great literature has always been moral. A heat-white passion for righteousness colored the utterances of the Hebrew prophets. Those who claim a devotion to pure beauty on the part of the Greeks have misread their Plato and Sophocles. The Latin classics were informed with ideas. Witness also the great pieces of the French and German writers.

The decline of the aesthetic school resulted in views marked by sanity and depth of understanding. As a consequence we have now something more than a truce; in fact something like a rapprochement of the two forces. Nietzsche's conception of the superman was a counter-influence wholesomely masculine. Since his day critics have given the theory of art for art's sake one blow after another. The idea began to wane in 1897 with the appearance of Tolstoi's What is Art though few of its opponents could go all the way with Tolstoi in his extreme view of the importance of morality in art. John Addington Symonds took the stand that poets take their final rank from matter and not from form: "The carving of cherry-stones inverse, the turning of triolets and rondeaux, the seeking after sound and color without heed for sense is all foredoomed to failure."[1] A.C.Bradley declares that poetry inheres in ideas. George E.Woodberry

1 Essays Speculative and Suggestive, London, p.318.
2 Oxford Lectures on Poetry, London, 1920, p.34, note g.

points out the unity of the mental process in the creation of poetry:

> Can there be any surprise when I say that the method of idealism is the method of all thought? that in its intellectual process, the art of the poet, so far from being a sort of incantation, is the same as belongs to the logician, the chemist, the statesman? It is no more than to say that in creating literature, the mind acts; the action of the mind is thought; and there are no more two ways of thinking than two ways of gravitation.[1]

Brandes goes farther by saying that the formula, "written with a purpose" has been too long employed as an effective scarecrow to drive authors away from the fruit which beckons to them from the modern tree of knowledge."[2] Even Croce who kept the theory alive after it had reached the aenemic stage, admits that moral concepts are sometimes justified in art.[3]

V

In view of this trend, it does not seem too sanguine to predict that art and morality are now approaching a harmony that will endure. That a misalignment has been of long duration is no reason why it should never end. In fact the excesses and perversions of two millennia have been necessary to reveal the true nature of this dichotomy. The integrating factor now is a deeper, broader conception of art--a conception that art has no other basis than life itself and must include the whole of life. Thought and morality have a place in art because they

1 Lectures on Aesthetic Criticism, Woodberry Society, 1913.
2 Quoted in The Literature of Ecstasy, Albert Mordell, 1921, p.142.
3 Ibid., p.145.

are a part of life. "As a matter of fact," says Eucken, "it was always a certain mediocre type of bourgeois or ecclesiastical life which was satisfied with mere morality.." On the other hand,"There has hardly ever been a creative artist of the first rank who professed the aesthetical view of life, for such a one cannot look upon art as a separate sphere dissociated from the rest of life."[1]

But there are manifest difficulties in admitting ideas, especially moral concepts to the realm of poetry,as the past survey intimates. John L.Lowes does not put the matter too strongly when he says:

> The intellectual element runs through poetry like a great watershed. On the one side the streams flow off toward the sublime;on the other they plunge headlong to the ridiculous. And the turn of a hair may save or damn. And the English tradition has steered a course not without lapses down the wrong side of thevridge with respect to one vitally important matter: Is it poetry's business to teach?"[2]

Among English poets,Shelley,Wordsworth,Keats,and Emerson have glimpsed the place of the higher truth in poetry; but they give no clear means of judging when beauty is truth and when it is not. Professor Lowes has done much to dispel the fogginess incident to the subject. "The intellectual element in poetry must be completely permeated with imagination and fused with feeling if it is not to mar when it should make." In other words poetry may teach if it teaches in art's way. Again he says:

1 Rudolf Eucken,Main Currents in Modern Thought,New York, 1912,p.406.
2 Convention and Revolt in Poetry,New York,1919,pp.323-324.
3 Ibid.,p.322.
4 Ibid.,p.329.

Once more, the end of art is the disclosure of beauty. But the great tradition of English poetry is sound in its insistence that beauty is latent in actions and ideas and may be present even when actions and ideas have ethical quality. I believe profoundly in the doctrine of art for art's sake...But I object to the limitation of the dictum to anything short of beauty wherever it is latent and awaiting the touch of art to release it and reveal it.[1]

But exception may be taken to Professor Lowes' expression, wherever it is latent and awaiting the touch of art to release it." It is what we sometimes hear in references to the sculptor who is said to release the figure imprisoned in the marble. The metaphor is pretty and catches the fancy. But the underlying conception is scarcely sound. The figure is in the sculptor's mind instead of the marble. Truth and morality are indeed intractable material. They have nothing of latent beauty in them. Philosophical thought will give a better account of the art activity. Two things are essential if truth and morality are to be made plastic for art; the union of content and form and the subjective activity of the mind of the artist. Schelling had the true insight as is shown in his conception of the organic nature of art. Coleridge whose aesthetic theory was largely acquired from Schelling speaks thus of the shaping power of the imagination:

The poet described in ideal perfection brings the whole soul of man into activity... He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends and fuses each into each by that synthetic and

1 Lowes, op.cit., p.329.

magical power to which I would exclusively appropriate the name Imagination. This power first put in action by the will and understanding and retained under their irremissive, though gentle and unnoticed control, laxis effertur habenis, reveals itself in the balance or reconcilement of opposite or discordantqualities: of sameness with difference; of the general with the concrete; the idea with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness with the old and familiar objects; amore than usual state of emotion with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady self-possession with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and thevartificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poet.[1]

This is quoted in full because by its very diffuseness Coleridge succeeds in giving a glimpse of the poet's mind at work upon his material, integrating form and content. Better still is the statement of the case by Hegel. That part of his theory which relates to didactic poetry is a necessary corallary to his conception of art: "The ideal in art is the fusion of inner concept to outer form into a whole so complete that its antithetic factors are no longer distinguishable."[2] With reference to didactic poetry two statements are invaluable criteria for recog- the right and the wrong use of ideas: "Art can be employed in the didactic poem only on what concerns the external part."[3] If the intellectual content is to become poetry, "the external phenomena and its meaning must not be developed in complete separation."[4]

1 Biographia Literaria, Complete Works, Harper, 1872, Vol. III, p.375.
2 George William Friedrich Hegel, The Philosophy of Art (Aesthetik), tr. W.M.Bryant, p.xv of translator's Introduction.
3 Ibid., p.43.
4 Ibid., p.43. The italics are mine, the passages being fundamental in this thesis as criteria for judging when a poem of ideas is didactic.

All this is conditioned by the self of the poet. The raw material must undergo sublimation. This takes place when as Emerson declares, the intellect "is released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its own celestial fire."[1] Iamblichus puts it thus: "Divinity seizes the soul of the poet and guides it as he will."[2] This may sound like the theory of inspiration, but it is the higher subjectivism. For there is a lower, and it is deadly to the creation of art. This is the state of mind in which the would-be artist is occupied with his own ego. He is not free, not possessed by his subject. He is filled with thoughts of his audience, or his desire to communicate is in excess of his desire to create. Thus he lacks the detachment which insures the authentic note in his creation. But the higher subjectivism is the stark process whereby the artist, free from self-consciousness, turns the soul inward upon his material. And it is no paradox to say that the product which has passed through this subjective fire is wholesomely objective. Indeed it is objective to the artist, himself, through his complete forgetfulness of self during the creation. But it is not completely objective to the beholder. The trend of recent aesthetic theory points to the subjective nature of beauty. The Victory of Samothrace is an isolated perfection apart from the beholder and at the same time permeated with his own ego as he momentarily identifies himself with the speaking intent of the artist and so shares in the creative process. However confusing

1 Essays, Second Series, "The Poet," Vol. III, p. 27.
2 Quoted by Watts-Dunton, "Poetry," Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition, Vol. XVIII.

this matter may seem, one thing is clear. In creative works of the first rank the objectivity or detachment of the artist is unmistakable.[1]

Keeping in mind, then, the psychological process whereby the material presented to consciousness is made plastic for art through fusion with imagination, emotion, and reason, and applying the Hegelian dicta, we have helpful criteria for judging when poetry teaches in art's way and when it does not. Thus, informational verse is usually not poetry because form and content have been developed in complete separation:

> The senate's language and the public acts
> And measurements of the government, though both
> Weak and of heartless omen had not power
> To daunt me; in the People was my trust.[2]

Likewise in so-called moralizing, the abstract concepts are

1 Cf. Goethe in the following: "He the poet deserves not the name while he only speaks out of his few subjective feelings. But as soon as he can appropriate to himself and express the world, he is a poet. Then he is inexhaustible and can always be new, while a subjective nature has soon talked out his little internal material and is at last ruined by mannerism." "All eras in a state of decline and dissolution are subjective... on the other hand all progressive eras have an objective tendency. Our present time is retrograde, for it is subjective... All healthy effort is directed from the inward to the outward world as you will see in great eras which have been really in a state of progression." Conversations with Eckermann, pp.136-7. It must not be forgotten here that the poet "appropriates to himself" the world. This is the subjective activity. Goethe sometimes uses the word in this sense. "The majority of our young poets have no fault but this, that their subjectivity is not important, and they cannot find matter in the objective." Ibid., p.78.

2 William Wordsworth, The Prelude, Cambridge Edition of Works, p.202.

ready-made and artificially fitted to some existing form:

> By Nature's law what may be,may be now;
> There's no prerogative in human hours,
> In human hearts what bolder thought can rise
> Than'man's presumption on tomorrow's dawn.[1]

If the form is artistic but the content false,we have the meretricious:

> All Nature is but Art unknown to thee;
> All Chance,Direction which thou canst not see.
> All Discord,Harmony not understood;
> All partial evil,Universal Good.[2]

If the form is pleasing but the imaginative quality of the content has faded,we have the trite or platitudinous. Thus Young describes Pleasure:

> Many her haunts. Thou might have seen her now
> With Indolence lolling on the mid-day couch,
> And whispering drowsy words; and now at dawn
> Loudly and rough,joining the sylvan horn.[3]

If the form is satisfying but the content bulky and unassimilated,we have the heavy. Of those guilty of perpetrating this type of didacticism,all that tread the globe are but a handful to the tribes that slumber in its bosom. Happily their works slumber with them. To the credit of posterity the Ormulums and Polyolbions sleep with the forgotten. Their authors tried to write better than they could. They were determined to leave remains. The quantity of this didactic poetry is appalling.

1 Robert Pollok,The Course of Time,New York,n.d.,p.94.
2 Alexander Pope,Poetical Works,New York,1911,p.86.
3 Night Thoughts,New York,1854,p.

And our truest poets have sometimes wandered into this sterile realm. John Donne has much to answer for in this vein; and "holy George Herbert." Here,too, we shall have to put the Excursion,valuable as it is. And,dare we say it? here,too, shall we put the theological Beatrice stepping among the ranks of the spheres of Paradise and discoursing neat homilies.

It is more difficult to separate the sententious from true wit. But this can be said: In the sententious,superficial content is usually clothed in attractive form. It aims to startle. It shows a cheap effort to win applause. Or it forces a half-truth into the ready-made form of epigram. But it is clear that the merely sententious is closely allied to the gnomic which is often true poetry. When proverbial wisdom has a perennial freshness of content combined with perfection of form,it is literature. If it be metrical or have a patterned rhythm,it is poetry. True wit is a fine illustration of the Hegelian fusion of form and content. But there is a difficulty here. For the fusion is effected by means of the reason instead of the imagination. The problem of what to do with Pope and verse-satire is involved in this difference. Alden's definition of poetry as "the art of representing human experiences in so far as they are of lasting or universal interest in metrical language,usually with reference to the emotions and by means of the imagination," makes a place for reason. By including the word,"usually," he intends to "make a place for a certain type of literature in verse which it would be exceedingly difficult to classify... Sometimes human experiences which may be regarded as of lasting or universal

interest are expressed in metrical language and with artistic form and finish,but without chief reference to the emotions and by the processes of reason rather than imagination. It cannot be denied that the verse form in which they are written gives a certain sense of finish and completeness and--for some readers at least--adds to the pleasure they are capable of producing. If not poetry,then what are they to be called?"[1]

Here we need to keep in mind the essence of poetic enjoyment. It will be well to examine anew what happens in consciousness when we enjoy a poem. Subtleties aside,does not the pleasure consist in a flash and an afterglow,the one objective,the other subjective? the one passive,the other active? first there is the vision of perfection and second,its contemplation. What was implicit in the flash of perfection is made explicit by a completing process of the mind. This completing process is a creating process and is the culminating part of the experience.The flash or impact on consciousness comes from the externality of the poem. The afterglow of contemplation is a shadowy penumbra which evokes the two fountain springs of poetry,Memory and Wonder--and sometimes a third,Reason. Sometimes the completing activity consists in evoking an image; sometimes it involves living over again a feeling; sometimes it consists in projecting the self into the new experience,or in aligning that which is flashd on consciousness with the universal. If this completing process is only half the experience,it is the greater half. Now in reasoned poetry the completing process is effected not through im-

1 Alden,op.cit.,p.23.

age or feeling but through idea. The penumbra is in this case a shadow of thought.,the filling out of which gives poetic pleasure. And the greater the shadowy more which the mind must discover and align with life,the greater the poetic quality,granting that the form be metrical or have a sustained rhythmic pattern. If it be objected that literary prose also requires a completing activity of idea,the answer is that by reason of musical language the completing process here is greater. The consciousness of the reader has assumed the "lifted mood of song."

If this view be sound, it makes a place in the realm of poetry for Pope,Dryden,and other writers of satire in verse who have been accounted great. But it must be noted that since the musical language is the chief difference between this poetry and literary prose,it cannot be as great as that poetry which is musical and at the same time imaginative and emotional.

If the latter type contain truth,it is greatest of all. Greatest of all because it touches us in every part of our nature. Mention has been made of memory and wonder as sources of poetry,particularly as belonging to what has been called the completing or creating activity in the enjoyment of poetry. In those-rudimentary developments of the artistic nature in primitive man, the memory evoked by the impact on consciousness of an object of beauty or power must have been meager and of simple nature. But with the accumulated experience of the race,it has become rich and complex. On the other hand the appeal to wonder must have been very great and intense. But just as the accumulated experience has enriched memory,it has reduced man's capacity for wonder,especially in the old poetic,myth-making way of early

man. What has really happened to the wonder faculty is that it has taken new forms,multiplying by division,accretions and new growths. And something of its old power and beauty still linger in the realm of philosophy,no longer naive and child-like, but full-grown and austere. And this is why the spirit of philosophy is allied to the spirit of poetry. It was so in the beginning. In that first escape from the cloudland of myth and legend,when the Milesian thinkers in their search for Reality groped among the elements,earth,air,fire,and water,or pondered on the Many and the One,they spoke in poetry. Even today we find poetic passages in Spinoza,Kant,and Bergson. Modifications of the wonder faculty have produced the greatest poetry. Here we have the "powerful and beautiful application of ideas" to life. Here belong,Job,Antigone,Faust,Paradise Lost,and In Memoriam.

It will be seen that the word didactic in this thesis will be used only with the adverse implications which are now accepted in the ordinary use of the term. Didactic verse aims to teach by obtruding ideas,particularly ideas of morality. To obtrude ideas is to thrust them into an artistic creation without subjecting them to the fusion of passion,imagination or reason,and to do so for some utilitarian purpose. For a poet to be didactic today is to exhibit the unglamorous impotence of one who knows not that he knows not the way of art.

But unfortunately our poetic nomenclature is limited in that we have no one word to designate a large class of poems which do teach but which are,nevertheless,the truest poetry. The term philosophical has been used,but it is often too ambitious.

The term expository has been suggested, but it savors of the classroom. To speak of the lyric of thought and the lyric of feeling is a clumsy device. A useful makeshift is the term reflective, and for want of a better we shall have to make it do. But it would be a decided advantage if we could reserve the word lyric for those poems which are truly subjective or which are song-like in quality and apply the term reflective exclusively to the more objective expressions of thought in poetry. For there is a vast difference between these two types. It is the difference between the Sonnets from the Portuguese and De Rerum Natura, between Auld Lang Syne and Rabbi Ben Ezra. And yet at present the word lyric is made to do double duty and the term reflective is not given a definite standing in critical usage. Reflective poetry should be recognized as a fourth type as definite as epic, lyric, or dramatic. Very little critical study has been devoted to the nature and requirements of this kind of poetry. In most discussions of lyric poetry it soon becomes apparent that the author is thinking of the short song-like or extremely subjective pieces.[1]

In the light of the foregoing views the following definitions have been adopted for this thesis:

1 Cf. the discussion by Palgrave in the Preface to the Golden Treasury, by Alden in An Introduction to Poetry, by Bliss Perry in A Study of Poetry, and by Woodberry in The Appreciation of Literature.

1. Art is something shaped by man into satisfying form from a preconceived design. In the fine arts this design is concerned with beauty.

2. Poetry is the artistic expression of the human mind in metrical language or in language that has a sustained rhythmic pattern.

3. Lyric will be applied only to song or to the more subjective expressions of thought and feeling.

4. Reflective will be the term used to designate the artistic use of ideas in poetry. It will apply to impersonal, objective thought.

5. By the artistic use of ideas is meant: ideas permeated by imagination and fused with feeling.

6. But when the fusion of form and content is effected through a rational process and the product is an expression of universal experience, it is to be accounted as poetry if it meet the metrical or rhythmical requirements of poetry. This admits satire, epigram, and proverb to the province of poetry.

7. Didactic will be used only with the adverse implications which are now accepted in the ordinary use of the word. The prostitution of the creative impulse to utilitarian purposes is the essence of didacticism.

8. Didactic poetry includes:

(a) Versified information.
(b) Moralizing.
(c) The merely aphoristic or sententious.

9. If a poet chooses themes from utilitarian aims, he is open to the charge of didacticism.

10. Generally speaking, poetry which contains thought is greater than poetry which does not.

11. Generally speaking, the greatest poems are long because they focus more experience, touch life at more points.

CHAPTER THREE

TENNYSON:PERSONAL AND ARTISTIC QUALITIES

I

Alfred Tennyson was unusually fortunate in the conditions of his life. Good blood in his ancestry determined the robustness of his physique and the fiber of his mind. A balance in the qualities of his parents,piety in the mother and a bent for scholarly pursuits with a temperamental moodiness in the father effected a blend not unsuited to the making of a poet. A lively brood of gifted brothers and sisters made sure of love,laughter,and mind striking fire on mind. In the place of his birth he was no less fortunate. Somersby parish was a secluded corner of a turbulent world. Outside in England,the stagnancy and corruption of the Regency;within,the gentle living and sweet sanctities of a country parsonage. Beyond his island,the Napoleonic wars and diplomats in council;within,the rector among his books and a young lad already shouting his verses to the fields and soon to make his acquaintance with Vergil and Catullus. Natural beauty was not wanting. The rectory gardens with bowery lanes and "long alleys falling down to twilight grots," the orchard,the brook,the churchyard haunted his memory. Late in life the poet loved to recall the Fairy wood,the glen,the cold springs flowing from under the sandstone rocks,the flowers,the mosses,the ferns. The Lincolnshire landscape made its own unique appeal. And not too

distant at Mablethorpe, was the sea in the tumultuous mood he loved. In such a spot and with such companions the days were long but not too long. "Small thought was there of life's distress." [1]

And the world of Somersby rectory was an epitome of Tennyson's whole life. The happily provocative family life there gave place at Cambridge to an intellectual milieu still more stimulating among the bright youth who surrounded him at Trinity. Later the natural beauty of Somersby gardens and Lincolnshire was repeated at Farringford and Aldworth. Even the "darling room, white-curtained and peaceful had its counterpart in those attic studios which he established wherever he lived. And always there were companionship, leisure, and books. Thus the Sabine farm, the coterie, the upper room formed the setting of a life which was undramatic in external event, but rich in all that could feed the soul of a poet--the Sabine farm with its retirement and its rich contribution of natural beauty, the coterie of minds unusually gifted, the upper room with its intimacies among loved ones and the greatest minds of his world.

His life was fortunate but not too fortunate. There is small warrant for the view of Hugh I. Fausset and of M. Taine before him, that the great defect in Tennyson's life was that he had nothing

1 Ode to Memory, Complete Works, The Poetic and Dramatic Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Cambridge Edition, 1914, p. 12.

to endure.[1] It can scarcely be said of a man who lost his own small fortune and that of others, who consequently passed through years of financial stress, and who had to postpone his marriage for fourteen years, that he was unacquainted with the major crises of life. Add to these the loss of his loved friend, Hallam, and in later life of his promising son, Lionel, who was buried at sea. The grief Tennyson felt for these bereavements was not merely that which could be used for literary purposes. It was the cleansing sorrow from which comes the penetrating knowledge of the Way of the Soul.

Two of these major influences in the life of Tennyson, the human stimulus and that of natural beauty require detailed consideration.

II

The rector of Somersby was a man of superior ability and varied attainments who had tried his hand with fair success at architecture, painting, music, and poetry. He did not enter the church from choice or because of special fitness. We find in

1 H.A.Taine, A History of English literature, 1871, pp.535-541. In a jaunty veiled ridicule M.Taine contrasts the well-born, well ordered life of Tennyson with that of Alfred de Musset; "From this wretched place came the most impassioned of his poems. These vilenesses and vulgarities of the stews and lodging-houses caused this divine eloquence to flow! It was these which at such a moment gathered in this bruised heart all the splendors of history to make them spring up in sparkling jets and shine under the most glowing sun that ever rose! We feel pity; we think of that other poet away there in the Isle of Wight who amuses himself by dressing up lost epics. How happy is he amongst his fine books, his honeysuckles and roses!" Fausset writes of the "relaxed fastidiousness" due to Tennyson's too fortunate life. Tennyson A Modern Portrait, p.56.

his grandson's account of him no hint of the religious fervor of the evangelical,none of the holiness of George Herbert or Richard Baxter,and none of the mysticism of Newman. His religion was rather the conventional faith of a man whose business it was to be an Anglican clergyman. Perhaps it was just as well. For the mother possessed piety and all gentle perfections which in an unattractive woman might awaken feelings of satiety but which in a beautiful woman were enhanced by humor and a "bright thorough-edged intellect."[1] But it is folly to attempt to trace all qualities of a personality to ancestry or parentage. To do so implies that Nature has no originality,cannot produce with reckless irrelevance a new thing in the world. But the father of our poet possessed two qualities which are traceable in a modified form in the son. The one was that dark-minded brooding from which the Tennyson children suffered,and none more keenly than Alfred. In him it re-appeared as that pervasive melancholy which is nothing less than a recognition of the sorrow which lies at the heart of life and without which recognition no considerable poet has ever lived. The other noteworthy contribution of the elder Tennyson to the quality of the son was his love of the Greek and Latin poets. In his eleventh year,freed from the Louth Grammar School,the lad began under the direction of his father that study which was to lead to the joys of Vergil and Catullus and which had no little to do in forming his poetic creed and style. The human stimulus came also from eleven brothers and sisters,

1 Works,Isabel,p.12. "In the poem, 'Isabel,'my father more or less described his mother." Hallam Tennyson,Alfred Lord Tennyson a Memoir,New York,1912,p.7.

more or less gifted, four of whom, Frederick, Charles, Edward, and Mary were given to writing verses. Besides the contagion of creative work, there must have been in so large a family the wholesome give and take of young barbarians at play. In this connection one cannot help comparing the childhood of the future poet with that of the boy, Ruskin, sitting demurely with his book in a little chair in his alcove with no one to love and nothing to endure.[1] We can well understand how Tennyson escaped a certain priggishness that hampered Ruskin to the end of his days.

The stimulus of interesting personalities was continued at Trinity. Undoubtedly this was the best thing his university did for Tennyson. The Cambridge of his day could not, so far as academic attainments are concerned, have contributed much to forward-looking, original minds. Adam Sidgwick published in 1833 A Discourse on the Studies of Cambridge University in which he lamented the lack of training in imagination and taste, and the over-emphasis on verbal criticism. Likewise he noted the poverty of the curriculum and recommended the introduction of historical study. Not until 1837 were such studies included together with political economy. Sidgewick deplored the time spent on Paley and the Utilitarian philosophy. Mathematical honors for entrance were not abolished until 1850. The religious test for degrees was continued as late as 1871.[2] Macaulay complained of the Cambridge of his day that young men could go out loaded with prizes and academic honors but with their real education yet to begin.[3] In 1838

1 Praeterita, Cabinet edition, chap. iii.
2 J. Bass Mullinger, History of Cambridge University, London, 1888.
3 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 66.

when Whewell was elected to the chair of Moral Philosophy, he began his introductory address by an elaborate justification of the subject he was to teach.[1]

Tennyson's first impression of the studies required was that none "but dry-headed, calculating, angular little gentlemen can take much delight in them." A slightly sophomoric poem of 1830 closed with

> your manner sorts
> Not with this age wherefrom ye stand apart
> Because the lips of little children preach
> Against you; you that do profess to teach
> And teach us nothing, feeding not the heart.[2]

In spite of these bitter lines Tennyson referred to his life at the University as "that dawn-golden time." If the curriculum and scholastic methods were deficient, there were, at least t the atmosphere and the traditions. There were the memories of the long past. The faces of great ones looked down upon them. Milton, Byron, and Wordsworth had once been familiar figures in the halls and walks. Still more formative was the group known as the "Apostles" to which Tennyson belonged. To speak accurately of these youth, one must speak in superlatives. They were all good-looking--some of them, as Hallam and Sterling, positively beautiful without any loss of virility. They were bound for great things and did distinguish themselves.[3] They dabbled in

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 67.
2 Ibid., p. 67.
3 Spedding became a distinguished Baconian scholar, author of Bacon's Life and Works, Kemble translated Beowulf and became Lecturer on Anglo-Saxon at Cambridge. Trench became Archbishop of London, Maurice founded the Working-men's College and wrote Mental and Moral Philosophy, to mention the most distinguished. Others went into the church, into Parliament, wrote books and articles.

in writing. They tried verse.

A delightful gregariousness led them to talk and debate much together. And they loved each other with an affection which appears in their letters. They encouraged each other in literary efforts and criticized each other helpfully. They advertised each other. An old "Apostle" would introduce a new one with "You would like to know him." They had a habit of delivering letters for each other, for to do so expressed a dog-like devotion of which they were proud. When they were together, they frolicked, dined, danced, acted plays, and talked endlessly on high themes. When they were separated, they wrote delightful letters, full of news and wit, thoughtful and affectionate.

It was a wholesome, masculine world. One of the group described their purpose as identical with that implied in St. Augustine's description of friendship: "To talk and laugh with mutual concession, to read pleasant books; to jest and to be solemn, to dissent from each other without offense, to teach one another somewhat, somewhat to learn, to expect those absent with impatience and to embrace their return with joy."[1] The present Lord Tennyson describes them as a genial, high-spirited group who were full "of speculation and enthusiasm for the great literature of the past and for the modern schools of thought and despised rhetoric and sentimentalism."[2] They read Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, Mill, Bentham, Descartes, and Kant. They discussed such problems in their meetings as the origin of evil, the derivation of the moral sentiment, the

1 Frances M. Brookfield, The Cambridge "Apostles," New York, 1906, p.8.
2 Memoir, Vol. I, p.36.

personality of God, prayer. In politics they were liberals standing for Catholic Emancipation, the Revolution of 1830, the Reform Bill of 1832, and some of them championed the vexed case of the rights of woman. In philosophy they were liberals, and their religion was touched with German rationalism. Eager and fearless, they were "longing to hear, bursting to tell." They spoke their views with unaffected nonchalance as to the sacred orthodoxies of Alma Mater. The spirit which prevailed was like that which animated Wordsworth's youth. Trench who came quickly through his period of religious doubt and who thereafter was marked by a spirual quality equal to that of Newman but without the mysticism of the latter used to grow impatient with what he called the whole band, "Platonico-Wordsworthian, Coleridgian Anti-Utilitarians."[1] Nor did they always escape the suspicions of Cambridge authorities. There are references to "the mousing owls" who were on the track of Sterling.[2] When Thirwell was considered for bishop, Melbourne appointed a commission to investigate his introduction to Schleiermacher and "smell out heterodoxy." This same Thirwell at another time, being a tutor, defended the "Apostles" when they were suspected of free discussion of theological matters. For this he lost his tutorship.[3]

After the publication of Poems Chiefly Lyrical, Tennyson became the idol of the "Apostles." He had, they thought, won the outworks of the fortress of fame. Their enthusiasm for his poetry was spoken of as the Tennyson cult. They had daily "divans" at which they read his works aloud. Laboriously they made copies of unpublished poems and circulated them. Thus the young po-

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 37.
2 Brookfield, op. cit., p. 177
3 Ibid., p. 14

et had a few appreciative readers during ten or twelve years of obscurity. Their praise was an antidote for the harsh criticism of his first volume. To feel that the friendly eyes of these bright companions were on him and that they expected great things of him set him free to do his best.

Of the other members of the society who were contemporary with Tennyson, Hallam was thought to be the most brilliant, and he was most loved for personal qualities. A.C.Benson in his study of Tennyson remarks that it is difficult to see why this young man so dazzled his contemporaries.[1] On the other hand Hugh I.Fausset considers that he was superior to Tennyson in strength of character and in interest in the political and humanitarian reforms of the day. He pictures the rather weak Tennyson as leaning on his friend.[2] There seems to be little warrant for the latter view. The Memoir furnishes reliable data on the subject. Hallam seems to have looked up to Tennyson as his superior. He estimated his own poetry with considerable accuracy. Having thought to print with Tennyson in the volume of 1830, he wisely changed his mind. He compared himself with Tennyson:

> I whose imagination is to yours as Pisgah to Canaan...am not without some knowledge and experience of your passion for the past. ...But what with you is universal and all-powerful, absorbing your whole existence, communicating to you that energy which is so glorious, in me is checked and counterbalanced by so many other impulses tending to deaden the influence of the senses which were already less vivacious by nature.[3]

Certain of his friend's ultimate fame, he predicts that future

1 Alfred Tennyson, New York, 1907.
2 Tennyson a Modern Portrait, New York, 1923, pp.25-27.
3 Memoir, Vol.I, p.51.

lovers of the beautiful and true "may seek in faithful pilgrimage the spot where Alfred's mind was molded."Hallam busied himself incessantly with the publishers in behalf of his friend. His poems contain two addressed to Tennyson. The Memoir gives seven letters. But of the 40000 letters from which a choice was made for these volumes,could not one from Tennyson to Hallam have been found worthy of inclusion? On the other hand we have an instance of neglect on the part of Tennyson. Having sent a publication to Tennyson,Hallam wrote:"I hope you will like it; yet I have not forgotten that the last time I sent you a publication of mine,you did not deign to read it. When should I have done the like by one of yours?"[1]

As a matter of fact there were reasons why Hallam should have dazzled his contemporaries. His bent was for scholarly subjects particularly metaphysics. The latter,it will be admitted,requires more mind than poetry if we may contrast the speculative and logical faculties with the imaginative. Tennyson said of him:"Arthur Hallam could take in the most abstruse ideas with the utmost rapidity...On one occasion,I remember,he mastered a difficult book of Descartes at a single sitting."[2] F.T.Palgrave gives additional testimony from Tennyson:

> I asked once whether the praises of Arthur Hallam which In Memoriam sets forth did not exceed the actual facts;whether affection and poetry together had not led him to overcolor. ...Tennyson's earnest look is still before me as he gave the assurance that he truly and fully believed that in no form or way had he exaggerated Arthur's wonderful promise...More than one school or college contemporary intimately known to me have exact-

1 Memoir,Vol.I,p.51.
2 Ibid.,p.74.

ly confirmed Tennyson's judgment.[1]

Gladstone's comment is that of an intimate friend:

> There was perhaps no one among those who were blessed with his friendship,nay as we see,not even Mr. Tennyson,who did not feel at once closely bound to him by commanding affection,and left far behind by the rapid,full,and rich development of his ever-searching mind.[2]

Such being his personality,Hallam undoubtedly had a certain influence over Tennyson in spite of the latter's independence and self-sufficiency.

III

Such were the dominating influences in the life of Tennyson previous to his recognition in 1842. It remains to estimate the personal and artistic qualities of the young poet who emerged from this nurture and environment. What was the heart of him?

Questionable is the opinion of Stopford Brooke that Tennyson had never been baptized in the Celtic waters.[3] As a matter of fact his uncle Charles who inherited the estate,took the name of d'Eyncourt because according to Burke and other heralds the Tennysons represented, the two branches of the old Norman family of that name. The dark-skinned,foreign look of the Tennysons,particularly of Alfred has been noted by his biographers. A temperamental melancholy seems to have characterized the family. Frederuck had it. Septimus is said to have once remarked,"I am the most melancholy of the Tennysons." Dr. Tennyson is described by his

1 Memoir,Vol.II,p.496.
2 Ibid.,p.299.
3 Tennyson:His Art in Relation to Modern Life,p.

son Charles as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," as "tossed about by strong troubles."[1] As a boy Alfred was sometimes so much frightened by his father's despondency that he more than once went out at night and threw himself on a grave in the churchyard praying to be beneath the sod himself. In spite of its histrionic aspect this incident reveals more than meets the eye. That the brooding melancholy of the father had been transmitted to the son there is evidence. References to his gloomy moods are not infrequent in the Memoir. One passage in particular is so illuminating for the light it throws on this and other qualities that it must be given in full:

> As a young man, my father's friends have often described him to me as having Johnsonian common-sense and a rare power of expression, very genial, full of enjoyment, full of sensitiveness, and full of humor, though with the passionate heart of a poet and sometimes feeling the melancholy of life. He passed through "moods of misery unutterable," but eventually shook them off. He remembers how when in London almost for the first time, one of these moods came over him as he realized that in a few years "all its inhabitants would be lying horizontal, stark and stiff in their coffins".[2]

Melancholy combined with a quaint humor and a vivid imagination are Celtic characteristics and Tennyson had them. The Johnsonian common-sense points to a different stock. It is probable that like Shakespeare Tennyson owed his quality to a blend of Saxon and Celtic blood. Saxon, too, was his sense for fact, which manifested itself in a life-long love of science. While a mere boy, he was a close observer of birds, beasts, and insects. Botany also claimed him. Greatest of all was his interest in astronomy. Being present

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 73.
2 Ibid., Vol. I, p. 40.

at a meeting of astronomers when the subject of star-dust was under discussion, Tennyson quietly mentioned eight different authorities on the subject. Other scientific books which he read were Lyell's Geology, Gilbert White's British Birds, Baxter's Flowering plants, Origin of Species, Hinton's Mystery of Matter, Chambers' Vestiges of Creation, Lyall's Antiquity of Man, Whewell's Plurality of Worlds.

In other fields the range of Tennyson's reading was extended. The brothers and sisters had browsed in Dr. Tennyson's library among ancient and modern literatures. The mottoes and footnotes of Poems by Two Brothers show a boyish avidity for encyclopedic information, representing fifty-two different authors. Later Tennyson acquired a reading knowledge of German, French, Spanish, Hebrew, Italian. His knowledge of the classics was greatest representing twenty-two different authors.[1] At one period he is described as reading novels at the rate of one a day. Other authors mentioned in the Memoir are Adam Smith, Froude, Motley, Pringle, Guizot, Montesquieu, Comte, Pascal, Martineau, Maurice, Hugo, Racine, Zola, Cervantes, Moliere, Spinoza, Schlegel, Fichte, Kant, Berkeley, Ferrier, Prudhomme, Musset, Berenger, and Verlaine.

If Tennyson's reading shows breadth of interests, and no mean scholarly equipment, the Memoir is equally rich in observations and incidents which point to a depth of nature. Like Milton Tennyson was a marked child. The fine head and handsome physique gave an impression of sensitiveness and strength. Tenderness and affection beyond the common marked him, especially in his relations

1 Referred to in W.P.Mustard's Classical Echoes in Tennyson, New York, 1904.

with children. Disharmonic elements appeared. Melancholy was balanced by humor,gruffness by tenderness,shyness by audacity, a love of solitude by a love of gayety. With all this went the independence,aloofness,and single-mindedness which so often characterize the youth of great men. One word more. He would have been more than human if he could have wholly escaped, the ill-effects of the leonization which resulted from his appearance and his unusual gifts.

IV

The artist has two absorbing interests:expression and the means of expression. There is the inner conception which he wishes to objectify;and there are the tools,the methods,the materials. Now these two,creativity and technique,are so intertwined and cooperative in the process whereby a work of art is produced, that it is scarcely good psychology to separate them. An understanding of Tennyson's artistic qualities must begin with that precocity in respect to poetic composition which appeared at an early age and which involved both of these activities. "The first poetry which moved me was my own at five years old," he once remarked. At eight he composed a line which he thought superior to anything in Campbell,Byron,or Scott. Before he could read,he was in the habit of spreading his arms to the wind and crying out,"I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind." A curious revelation of the early feeling for poetic subject and musical expression appears in the remark that the only good things he got from Louth Grammar School were the beauty of the old wall covered with weeds opposite the school windows,and the memory of the words,"sonus desilientis aquae." At about ten or eleven he wrote hundreds of

lines in the heroic couplet and could even improvise them. At twelve he wrote an epic of six thousand lines in the manner of Scott. Of this feat he said, "I never felt myself more inspired. I wrote as much as seventy lines at one time and used to go shouting them about the fields in the dark."[1] At fourteen he wrote a drama in blank verse of which Jowett exclaimed, "They are most original, and it is wonderful how the whelp could have known such things!"[2] But one quality stands out. His receptive powers were very great, and his love of beauty in landscape required satisfaction. His love of nature, however, was not like that of Wordsworth a seeing "into the life of things." It was more external, less spiritual. He saw the beauty and infinite variety of the natural world exactly as a painter does. As the painter is content to c catch the wonder, sublimity, loveliness, or terror of the scene, and has

> no need of a remoter charm
> By thought supplied nor any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye,

so Tennyson, in the manner of Keats visioned the world. Like Keats he saw intensely and his passion for adequate expression marked his quality as an artist. Nothing about his poetical equipment is more notable than this love of landscape and the pictorial aspects of natural beauty. The following rather copious list of incidents from the Memoir is included here as being necessary in order to give an adequate idea of the dominance of this phase of his art:

From his boyhood my father had a passion for the sea and especially for the North Sea in wild weather and for the glorious

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 12. Ibid., p. 23.

Sunsets over the flats.[1]

The immense sweep of the marsh inland and the whole weird strangeness of the place greatly moved him.[2]

And sometimes at half-tide the clap of the wave falling on the flat shore can be heard for miles and is accurately described in The Last Tournament[3]

For his exercise he either rowed or fenced or took long walks, and would go any distance to see "a bubbling brook."[4]

He playedhimself a little on the flute but only cared for complicated music as suggesting echoes of winds and waves.[5]
cated

He also records that he saw the moonlight reflected in a nightingale's eye as she was singing in a hedgerow.[6]

During the evening journeys between London and High Beech,"the light of London flaring like a dreary dawn" was an especial admiration of his.[7]

In those old days,coming down from the hill over Torquay I saw a star of phosphorescence made by the buoy appearing and disappearing in the dark sea,and wrote these lines.[8]

I think I saw more outlines of hills than ever I saw in my life; and exquisitely shaped are those Skye Mountains.[9]

Walked seaward. Large crimson clover; sea,purple and green like a peacock's neck. "By bays the peacock's neck in hue."[10]

The hills here have fine lights on them as seen from my windows.[11]

1 Memoir,Vol.I,p.40.
2 Ibid.,p.20.
3 Ibid.,p.21.
4 Ibid.,p.49
5 Ibid.,p.77
6 Ibid.,p.79
7 Ibid.,p.150
8 Ibid.,p.196.
9 Ibid.,p.281
10 Ibid.,p.375.
11 Ibid.,p.348.

The following picture furnished nine lines in Lancelot and Elaine: "I stood next morning a long time by the cabin door, and watched the green sea looking like a mountainous country, far-off waves with foam at the top looking like snowy mountains bounding the scene; one great wave green-shining, past with all its crests smoking high up beside the vessel."[1]

The high pillared beeches delighted A. "making a grand aisle, their leaves dappled with sunlight--a wonderful fawn-colored carpet of sward beneath."[2]

Notes made in Switzerland: "The last cloud clinging to the peak when all the mists have risen." "The top of the Jungfrau rich saffron colour at dawn, the faded moon beside it."[3]

A. said he did not think he had ever seen anything more sublime than the great plain of Sussex beneath us covered with moving mist and bellowing from end to end with thunder.[4]

I have often heard him describe this pool--"The splendor and ripply play of light on the stream as it gushes from the chalk over the green sand bottom, the mackerel colors which flit about in the sunshine, and the network of the current on the surface of the pool like crystal smoke."[5]

The vivid green of the ash trees, the islands of meadowsweet, willow-herb and harebell, and the rippling stream itself enchanted my father.[6]

"These mystic lights and the buoy-bell perpetually ringing at Land's End would have furnished good similes for Dante."[7]

While this intense lyric absorption in the pictorial occurred more frequently when he was looking at landscape, the pictorial mastered him wherever it appeared. The following are representative passages:

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 428.
2 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 24
3 Ibid., p. 65.
4 Ibid., p. 152
5 Ibid., p. 209
6 Ibid., p. 266.
7 Ibid., p. 341

A talked of the beautiful picture the girl-graduates would have made;the long hall glittering like a bed of flowers with daffodil and lilac.[1]

My father was charmed by the picture of the lonely philosopher, "a man of humorous-melancholy mark,with his gray floating locks sitting among his doves which perched about him on head and shoulders and knees,and cooed to him as he sat in the sunshine beneath his roses."[2]

This list has been extended to show that Tennyson's love of beauty was exceedingly like that of the painter,particularly the landscape painter. Sound images also put him under the spell of the artist,but visual images have the preponderance. His use of this pictorial subject-matter was not merely photographic.Here, too, he is like the painter. The scene comes out in the poem only after it has passed through the soul of the poet and has consequently the lyric quality. When in his tours he would come to a place which he particularly liked,he would say,"I want my pipe alone for ten minutes."[3] Palgrave in his recollections corroberates this habit: "It was also his way when we had entered on some scene of beauty or grandeur,that he should withdraw wholly from sight and study the view as it were in a little artificial solitude."[4] As would be expected, this extreme receptivity was accompanied by a facility for metaphor and simile.

A second quality of the pure artist was an extroardinary bent for technique. That he became a master craftsman is not surprising. From his first childish efforts he showed an inborn sense for diction and a facility in rhythm. These qualities are marked

1 Memoir,Vol.I,p.256.
2 Ibid.,II,p.316.
3 Ibid.,p.266
4 Ibid.,p.487.

throughout his career. Once bantering his sister Mary on her sonnet-writing,he said, "This is the sort of sonnet you would write to Swedenborg." Then he composed a sonnet off-hand and remarked, "There is a sonnet with an intricate set of rhymes and now I do not remember a word of it." [1]His son states that many of his shorter poems were made like this in a flash. The perfect Break,Break,Break was one of these. According to his own word, Crossing the Bar was written in five minutes. This natural facility gave rise to a life-long study of poetic forms. His many conversations on his art were apt to turn to technical matters relating to meter,diction,and stanza models. A list of these observations could be compiled from the Memoir quite as extended as the list showing his interest in landscape and the pictorial. He once declared that he knew the quantity of every word in the English language except"scissors."[2]He would talk of the subtleties of blank verse, of quantitative and accentual measures,of hexameters and Alcaics. Only an example of this discussion of tech-problems can give any idea of his ear for the nuances of poetical music. His Ode to Milton was thus annotated:

> My Alcaics are not intended for Horatian Alcaics,nor are Horace's Alcaics the Greek Alcaics,nor are his Sapphics,which are vastly inferior to Sappho's,the Greek Sapphics. The Horatian Alcaic is perhaps the stateliest meter in the world except the Virgilian hexameter at its best; but the Greek Alcaic,if we may judge from the two or three specimens left,had a much freer,lighter movement; and I have no doubt that an old Greek if he knew our language,would admit my Alcaics as legitimate,only Milton must nott be pronounced Milton.[3]

1 Memoir, Vol.I,p.487.
2 Ibid.,p.11.
3 Ibid.,p.14.

Of blank verse he said:

> The English public think that blank verse is the easiest thing in the world to write, mere prose cut up into five-foot lines; whereas it is one of the most difficult. In a blank verse you can have from three up to eight beats; but if you vary the beats unusually, the ordinary critic sets up a howl. The varying of the beats, of the construction of the feet, of the emphasis, of the extra-metrical syllables and of the pauses, helps to make the greatness of blank verse. There are many other things besides, for instance a fine ear for vowel sounds and the kicking of the geese out of the boat (i.e. doing away with sibilation), but few educated men really understand the structure of blank verse.[1]

Of classical hexameters he would sometimes talk at length, making humorous and serious experiments in the use of quantitive verse in English.

This sense for the nuances of musical effects in poetry together with a bent for experimenting in metrics was further developed by an equipment which was beyond that of most poets. Although he was not a great linguistic scholar, Tennyson had sufficient knowledge of Spanish, Italian, French, and German to read these languages readily and what is still better for a poet, he had a feeling for the peculiar racial quality and tone-color of poetry in these languages. His ability in this respect was still more marked in the case of the Greek and Latin classics. His conversations about poetry were full of references to subtleties of diction and rhythm in the poetry of other languages. Goethe, he thought, could not quite overcome the harshness of the German. The French language he thought admirable for delicate shades of meaning but showed by illustration how inadequate it is for translating English poetry. Their Alexandrines he considered artificial. In his own Ulysses he had caught echoes of Dante. He believed,

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 14.

however, that English is finer than Italian for variety of sound, and that consequently Milton surpasses Dante in this respect. There are references which show his delight in the Greek. Shakespeare, he said, had fine Aeschylean lines. No man but Scott since Aeschylus could have written The Bride of Lammermoor. He could quote many lines from the Iliad and the Odyssey and talk subtly of the sound of a vowel in Euripides. Vergil and Catullus were the Latin masters he loved best; Catullus had "perfection of form," Vergil was "landscape-lover, lord of language."

Tennyson's conversations on poetry contain references to matters of diction as when he said, that the German language had great fine words; or that Browning "never greatly cares about the glory of words or beauty of form"; or that Milton surpassed Vergil in the grand style of poetic diction. These references, however, occur less frequently than those having to do with musical qualities. Still less frequent are references to the greatness of a poet's thought. Certain pages in the Memoir under the caption, "Criticism of Poets," contain opinions of Tennyson on Shakespeare and nineteen other poets. He had most to say about the subject-matter of Shakespeare. Of the twenty-six other comments, seventeen have to do with rhythm and music and nine with thought. The preponderance of the former throughout the Memoir is startling.

With this propensity for craftsmanship went two other qualities. Tennyson had the artist's temperamental delight in a beautiful passage and an equal abhorrence of a bad passage of poetry. Commenting on Pope he quoted:

What dire offence from amorous causes springs,

and remarked,"I would rather die than write such a line!"[1] Quoting a seventeenth century lyric,he concluded by saying, "There! I would give all my poetry to have made one song like that!" [2] Certain repartees in Shakespeare,he said,always brought tears to his eyes. Another quality was the artist's devotion to his art. No poet was ever more teachable. Many lines he altered in the belief that his critics were right. In polishing and revising he showed an almost preternatural industry. To use his own paraphrase and that of Ben Jonson,he was a poet born and a poet made.

Watts-Dunton distinguishes between poets of energy and poets of art. The former represent the movement of imaginative feeling, "one of the great primal forces which go to the development of the race and which in the wide sense has played as important a part as science." The latter represent poetry as a precise literary art. Among the ancients he classifies Pindar as a poet of energy and Vergil as a poet of art. Among English poets Mrs.Browning is a poet of energy and Keats a poet of art. In Homer,Aeschylus,Sophocles,Dante,Shakespeare,Milton,and perhaps Goethe,poetic energy and poetic art are in equipoise. From the poets listed we infer that poets of energy are those primarily concerned with great compelling overflow of imaginative thought and feeling; and poets of art are those primarily interested in precise literary expression. In the latter class,if we base our estimate on the Memoir,we will,a priori place Tennyson beside Keats.

1 Memoir,Vol.II,p.286.
2 Ibid.,I,p.211.
3 Encyclopedia Britannica,Eleventh Edition,Vol.XXI,p.877.

But a comparison of the two poets reveals a startling contrast. Each has given a record of his poetic theory, the former in his conversations, the latter in his letters. What the mind of Tennyson seized was the concrete thing which he etched graphically on his memory and thereafter occupied himself in giving it adequate expression. His comments deal mainly with such matters as alliteration, sibilants, accents, quantity, and imagery. Keats, on the other hand was often talking of beauty, of the imagination, of truth, of sensation, of the fine excess of poetry, and the holiness of the affections. He was concerned with the underlying philosophy of the aesthetic experience and was fascinated and speculative concerning this experience. Tennyson's mind was much simpler. He was scarcely concerned with such matters at all. He seems to have regarded art as representative of life. Keats was moving toward the conception of art as an interpretation of life. The comparison of the two poets is not detrimental to either. But it throws a searchlight on the basic quality of Tennyson.

V

We are not without definite expression from Tennyson as to his conception of poetry. In expostulating with Browning for his lack of form, he said, "An artist should get his workmanship as good as he can, and make his work as perfect as possible."[1] To a would-be poet he said, "Poetry should be the flower and fruit of a man's life in whatever stage of it, to be a worthy offering to the world."[2] His love of the classics was due to their perfection

1 Memoir, Vol. II, p. 230.
2 Ibid., p. 277.

of form. This perfection,he thought, was often a matter of compression. "It is only the concise and perfect work which will last."[1] His revisions of his own poetry and suggested emendation of the lines of others were in the direction of conciseness. He agreed with Wordsworth that "Art is selection." The art of Zola became monstrous in his eyes because he did not practice selection. "In the noblest genius there is need of self-restraint," was his belief.[2] His poetic masters were Milton,Shakespeare,and Keats among the English poets,and Catullus and Vergil among the Latin. Byron,his youthful love he came to regard as given to rhetoric. In the poets named who hsd so much to do with forming Tennyson, we find two qualities,freedom and restraint, which were to be somewhat fairly balanced when he had perfected his art.

Tennyson required solitude for poetic composition and held that a poet should maintain that aloofness from the world which would safeguard his art. In the youthful poem<u>The Poet's Mind</u>,he shows how great is the gulf between the dark-browed sophist,by whom he means the cynic, and the poet. It is significant that while the cynic cannot enter into the experience of the poet, the latter is painfully sensitive to his hollow smile and frozen sneer. The poet's mind is holy ground,his song of undying love, but the mockery of the cynic has power to blight and kill. It would not be safe to attach too much importance to this youthful poem were it not that we can see in it a hint of the blighting effect which adverse criticism of his poems had on Tennyson. This may have been due,not as has been supposed, to an un-

1 <u>Memoir</u>,Vol.II,p.122.
2 <u>Ibid.</u>,p.237.

manly reaction to wounded pride,but the temperamental quality of the artist which makes him shrink from the cold misunderstanding touch of the non-artistic nature.

This examination of Tennyson,the artist, as seen in the copious materials of the Memoir, reveals that his germ quality is precisely that of the plastic artist,particularly that of the landscape painter,who is mastered by what he sees,who passes the experience through its incubation and presents it transfigured by this process,and who talks enthusiastically with his fellow artists of color.line,and values. By this it is not meant to belittle Tennyson's artistic quality any more than one would belittle the quality of Corot or Inness. How this quality will be modified and enriched as his sense of life deepens can only be seen in connection with a study of his poetry. That his gift as "landscape-lover,lord of language" will be modified and enriched goes without saying. And since his medium,language is also the medium of science,of morality, and of the plain prose of life, the direction which his development will take,it is safe to predict,will be on far different lines from that of the landscape artist. The problem will be complicated by the fact that he is exceptionally well-stocked with facts and ideas in history,philosophy,and science. But the most serious complications will relate to conditions outside himself.

CHAPTER FOUR

DIDACTIC INFLUENCES

I

By 1832 Tennyson's native artistic gifts had emerged. The creative impulse, fertile and vigorous, was supplemented by an absorbing delight in good workmanship. These powers were, to be sure undisciplined, unfurnished, and immature but capable of being clearly discerned in their true inwardness. This chapter will consider the didactic influences which played upon him from the first. The conflict between pure creation and didacticism may then be examined in the poems themselves.

All poets, even the most original, build their house of life upon the traditions of their race and the practice of their predecessors. We have seen that the conception of art for utility's sake was strongly established in the culture of the Western world, having been enriched by the tributary streams of Hellenism and the Christian church, and being by the opening of the nineteenth century only too well illustrated by literary genres and by the practice of poets great and small. This was especially true of English poetry. As a recent critic puts it, "English poetry has been in large measure a poetry of ideas, and that has been both its glory, and on occasion its undoing."[1] But it is safe to go still further and say that the impulse to instruct and to uplift

1 John L. Lowes, Convention and Revolt in Poetry

through poetry has taken hold of the English nature and in the case of minor poets with disastrous results. The existence of didactic models has worked harm. For a natural inertia from which even poets are not exempt has permitted the use of old bottles for new wine. For example the diverting of the pastoral motif to didactic ends,the existence of allegory,satire,and verse treatises were the means of an unfortunate literary contagion. Moreover, when a great poet or a school of poets seizes upon one of these forms and gives a signal example of its use,the type tends to become fixed. For this reason Spenser is a pivotal figure in the history of the didactic tradition in English poetry. By reason of his genius for the "rhythmical creation of beauty" his influence among poets was dominant and of long duration. But with this pure poetry were woven two main strands of the moral temper--Platonism and Puritanism. His explicit intent to uplift his age shines through his minor poems and culminates in his purpose "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline." At the positive pole is his Platonism which seeks to produce an exact correspondence between the Beautiful and the Good. His Puritanism represents the negative pole of Discipline and repression as seen in the figures,Temperance,Chastity,Justice, and Holiness. Spenser had,besides,no little to do with stereotyping a variety of didactic molds as pastoral,satire,fable, allegory and lament.

In Milton and his imitators the Puritan temper received emphasis,particularly in that off-shoot the"metaphysical poets." Lacking the "assimilating alchemy" of their great master,they perpetrated much heaviness,sometimes in over-subtle disquisition

more often in the phrase burdened with raw concepts so frequent in the poetry of Herbert. Next among the high spots of English didacticism came the verse essayists represented by Dryden and Pope. Wordsworth marks the culmination with his Prelude and Excursion. Granting that some of this was in reality "the powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life," even so, the actual quantity of versified prose in English literature before Tennyson is appalling.

Such was the racial literary heritage of the young poet. Fortunately,three of the poets on whom the youthful Tennyson formed himself,Byron,Keats,and Catullus were untouched by the didactic spirit. Furthermore, his home life at Somersby was not detrimental to the free development of his genius. As much,however cannot be said for the influence of the "Apostles." Their biographer,Frances M.Brookfield, describes them as having the laudable desire to right all wrong.[1] It was characteristic of them that one of their number should remark on the death of Hallam that "they must be more earnest since the laborers are fewer."[2] H.C.Grierson considers that "the high seriousness of Hallam and his Cambridge friends,their sympathy with moral and political problems,tended to charge his work with didactic intention."[3] The total impact of this gentle pressure must have been considerable. Hallam writing to Tennyson's mother after the publication of the volume of 1830 observes:

1 Brookfield,op.cit.,p.17.
2 Ibid.,p.155.
3 Cambridge History of English Literature,Vol.XIII,p.43.

He is a true and thorough poet if there ever was one; and tho' I fear his book is far too good to be popular, yet I have full faith that he has thrown out sparks that will kindle somewhere and will vivify young generous hearts in the days that are coming to a clearer perception of what is beautiful and good.[1]

Blakesley with great belief in the social value of poetry writes to Tennyson:

The present race of monstrous opinions and feelings which pervade the age require the arm of a strong iconoclast. A volume of poetry written in the proper spirit, a spirit like that which a vigorous mind induces by the study of Wordsworth and Shelley, would be at the present juncture, the greatest benefit the world could receive.[2]

The comment of fellow "Apostles on the volume of 1832 could not have been without a shaping influence. Of this volume Spedding wrote:

His genius was manifestly shaping a course for itself and finding out its proper business; the moral soul was beginning more and more to assume its due predominance, not in the way of formal preaching (the proper vehicle of which is prose) but in the shape of the color which his creations unconsciously took and the feelings which they were made insensibly to suggest.[3]

Venables wrote commenting on the fact that the great Catholic painters could express what was at the same time ideal and real in the minds of the people; but the modern artist can scarcely ever find similar objects of high imagination and popular feeling for his art to work upon. He continued:

If an artist could only now find out where those subjects are, he would be the artist of modern times...They were not to be sought in any transient fashion of thought but in the "convergent tendencies of many opinions" on religion, art, and nature--of which tendencies he and others believed that Tennyson with

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p.83.
2 Ibid., p.98.
3 Ibid., p.123.

his commanding intellect and conspicuous moral courage, ought to be the artistic exponent and unifier.[1]

In the light of Tennyson's total output, one is tempted to believe that this was the method he was feeling after.

The personality of Hallam and his relations with Tennyson have already been touched on. The view of Grierson that he was partly responsible for the too purposeful attitude toward his mission as a poet may be sound as far as it goes. Expressions of piety are not infrequent in his letters. When Tennyson lamented that he had in himself more of the Beautiful than the Good, Hallam replied, "Remember to your comfort that God has given you to see the difference." He thereupon recommended his reading Erskine of Linlathen, the liberal and mystic. Later he wrote, "Where the ideas of time and sorrow are not and sway not the soul with power, there is no true knowledge in Poetry or Philosophy." On the other hand Hallam's poems to Tennyson cannot be cited as proof that Grierson is right. And at least one expression in his review of the volume of 1830 seems to be an excellent warning against the didactic tendency:

> The elevated habits of thought implied in these compositions impart a sober mellowness of tone more impressive to our minds than if the author had drawn up a set of opinions in verse and sought to instruct the understanding rather than to communicate the love of beauty to the heart.[2]

Indeed there is strong reason for believing that Arthur Hallam did more to advance than to hinder Tennyson's artistic development. The death of a beautiful and beloved youth "recollected

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 123.
2 ibid., p. 50

in tranquility" was a means of deepening Tennyson's emotional nature and provided a great poetic theme.

Likewise some of the criticism of Tennyson's early poetry was beneficial, leading him to prune his youthful excesses. On the other hand there were a number who added fuel to the didactic fire. In January 1831 a notice of Poems Chiefly Lyrical probably written by Sir John Bowring appeared in the Westminster Review in which, commenting on The Poet, he thus advises the new author:

> It is not for such men to sink into mere verse-makers for the amusement of themselves or others. They can influence the association of unnumbered minds; they can command the sympathies of unnumbered hearts; they can disseminate principles; they can give those principles power over men's imaginations; they can excite in a good cause the sustained enthusiasm that is sure to conquer; they can blast the laurels of the tyrant and hallow the memories of the martyrs of patriotism; they can act with a force the extent of which it is difficult to imagine upon national feeling and character, and consequently upon national happiness.[1]

From across the waters came another voice. Margaret Fuller declared: "He has not suffered himself to become a mere intellectual voluptuary, nor the songster of fancy and passion, but has earnestly revolved the problems of life, and his conclusions are calmly noble.[2]

The gentle pressure of critics and friends who were filled with moral unction continued throughout Tennyson's life, sometimes by direct counsel and sometimes by praise in which the poet was ranked as the intellectual leader of the day. The influence toward didacticism of Jowett who knew Tennyson for forty years was insistent and took the form of suggesting poetic themes:

1 The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson, ed. William J. Rolfe Boston, 1895, Vol. I, p. 43.
2 Ibid., p. 50.

I wish Mr. Tennyson could be persuaded to put the Dogma of Immortality to verse...embodying the deep ethical feeling which convinces us that the end of the Maker though dark is not here. I believe that such a poem might be a possession for the world and better than ten thousand sermons.[1]

I do not see why the Greek mythology might not be the subject of a poem; not Wordsworth's "lively Grecian," but such as it is in the philosophical idea of it, as the twilight of the human mind which lingers still among forms of sense and is unable to pierce them.[2]

Have not many sciences such as Astronomy or Geology a side of feeling which is poetry? [3]

Painters like to teach new lessons in nature. Thus successive phases of the human mind in different ages are subjects for poetry, even more than philosophy. Might not the poet teach many lessons of that sort, not in the aesthetical, artistic manner of Goethe, but with simpler English poetic feeling.[4]

Ruskin, as might have been expected, added his word. He recommended subjects from the living present. The facts of modern life, he urged, "not formal drawing-room life, but the far away and quite unknown growth of souls in and through any form of misery or servitude. There is an infinity of what men should be told and what none but a poet can tell."[5] A voice from home added to the chorus of advice. Tennyson's mother invoked the Trinity, urging him to employ his talents "by taking every opportunity to impress the precepts of His Holy Word on the minds of others.[5]

II

Less direct but more subtly insinuating was another conditioning circumstance. Heavy in the scale of didactic influences which weighed upon the genius of Tennyson was the age in which

1 Memoir, Vol.I, p.43
2 Ibid., p.433.
3 Ibid., p.433.
4 Ibid., p.433.
5 Ibid., p.452.

The qualities represented by these concealments and inhibitions pervaded politics,religion,education, art and letters. Respectability and propriety in a somewhat artificial aspect ruled the day. In literature the evil was two-fold. Writers could not express the whole of life,and the interpretation they did give was too often unconsciously colored by the mistaken angle from which they viewed life.[1]

To maintain decorum,to promote reform--these two aims alone would furnish a fruitful field for writers bent on doing good. But the attack on orthodoxy provided a third field. Somehow the warp and woof of thought in Tennyson's mid-years centered in problems relating to the religious unrest of the day,growing out of the advance of science and the new Biblical criticism. A conflict in philosophical thought was an inescapable corallary.

Tennyson was the contemporary of Dalton,Faraday,Pasteur,Helmholtz,Morse,Stephenson,the Darwins,Wallace,Huxley,Tyndall and Herbert Spencer,to give only a few great names in the world of science. Most of the applications of scientific knowledge which we now enjoy were made in his lifetime. In pure science great advances were made in biology,geology,astronomy,anthropology, and pscychology. The Origin of Species was not the first upsetting book offered to the British public. Vestiges of Creation[2] had appeared in1844. Soon after Darwin came Sir Charles Lyell's The Antiquity of Man. These books,seeming to set aside the Biblical record raised an outcry. Indeed to pietists of the time,

1 Adverse comment on everything Victorian has become a commonplace of criticism. In spite of the recent trend of opinion in the opposite direction,certain points of the main accoint must stand. The great Victorians were great in spite of these restraints,not because of them.

2 By Robert Chambers.

he lived. In the first place humanitarian and political movements were in the air. A writer dealing with the period listed twenty-four reforms; these reforms did not relate to small affairs all in the day's work of legislatures,but to such vital and progressive matters as the abolition of slavery,removal of the disabilities of Jews and Catholics,expansion of education, extension of the franchise,and a dozen progressive measures. These movements for human betterment could not but make themselves felt in creative activity. Art,it was felt,should be moral. Until the aesthetic movement of the eighties,writers came to look upon their gifts as God-given for the uplift of humanity. The major writers felt so--among the essayists,Arnold,Ruskin,Carlyle,and Newman;among the novelists,Eliot,Thackeray,and Dickens. Poetry,too, was to feel the call of uplift.

With the advent of a maiden Queen strict morals and gentle manners began to pervade English life from Buckingham palace to the home of the humblest subject. Respect for the decencies sank deep into the consciousness of a people who had been shamed by the grossness of the Regency--a condition which saw little remedy under the reign of William. But the pendulum which registers the folkways of a people swung too far in the opposite direction. An excess of outward virtue came to hide an inner sterility. Gentle living shaded off into conventionality and the sentimental. Modesty became a false decorum. The domesticities of family life were praised with almost fatuous unction. Things pure and natural took on a faint tinge of the impure from an inner prudishness of mind. A superficial romanticism was assumed in all relations between the sexes.

a life and death struggle for religious faith seemed imminent. It is interesting to note the reticence and timidity of many of these authors of shocking books. They were fully conscious of the theologians. It is impossible to overstate the heat, the bitterness of controversy over the new biology and the new geology. Astronomy was to add its bit by way of the nebular hypothesis. While some conscientious scientists were trying to reconcile their findings with the Mosaic account, Biblical criticism came to the rescue with the information that "there is no Mosaic account but a mosaic account" made up of two conflicting records written long after Moses, of perfectly human origin--and uninspired.

The higher criticism of the Bible raised protests as violent as those excited by the evolutionists. German scholars of the latter half of the eighteenth century had been amassing the materials, and from their hands the critics of the nineteenth century received the torch. In this field Strauss's Life of Jesus was the upsetting book.[1] Here the author with great ability set forth the view that the Gospels are myth representing the concrete crystallization in story of the Messianic idea. Read eagerly by the youth of Cambridge and Oxford, the book sowed the seed of German rationalism and made Hegel whose disciple Strauss was, current in England. The book had an enormous influence in the direction of free thinking and was, of course, anathema to the church.

1 Even a brief list of the controversial books of the period will be its own comment: Francis Newman's Phases of Faith and his History of the Hebrew Monarchy, James Martineau's The Seat of Authority in Religion, F.D.Maurice's The Bible and the Claims of Science, Anthony Froude's The Nemesis of Faith, W.R.Greg's The Creed of Christendom, the Biblical criticism of Matthew Arnold, and the disturbing Westminster Review and Essays and Reviews.

These two forces, science and Biblical criticism, gradually throughout the century weakened confidence in the Scriptures as the basis of revealed religion. A roll-call of English writers who were unorthodox in early life or who became so is revealing. Shelley and Byron were frankly at odds with traditional theology. Coleridge was trying to bolster up his faith by a curious side-stepping which only deceives those who do not read him entire. Clough, Arnold, Swinburne, Carlyle, expressed their doubts sadly or defiantly according to temperament. Even Ruskin showed a change of faith as the years wore on. Asked in old age what he believed, he replied, "Simply nothing." Scott's influence was such that he turned George Eliot in the direction of free thinking before she had read either Comte or Strauss. Rossetti never professed any faith. F.D.Maurice, the friend of Tennyson was trying to keep, the middle of the road in his book on socialism and in The Bible and the Claims of Science. The experience of Sterling as recorded by Carlyle furnishes an interesting parallel to the storm and stress period of Tennyson. Robert Browning might be counted on to stand for the faith. Fears and Scruples is generally presented in the classroom as an imaginative picture of one passing through the experience of religious doubt. But was there ever a more terrible indictment of the God of orthodoxy? Could it have been written by one who had never been touched by the experience? He has, besides, for a defender of the faith, written some strange things in The Inn Album and La Saisiaz. Among continental writers, in so far as they were interested, in religion at all, the trend was away from theism. Ibsen, Nietzsche, and Maeterlinck were emphatic in their rejection of Christianity. Renan

let it be understood that he was not orthodox. Taine ceased to believe in supernatural religion at an early age.

The two phases of the conflict between religion and science were intertwined with philosophical thought which was comprised in the trend toward materialism and counter movements against materialism. So far as traditional religion was concerned, philosophy, like science and the higher criticism, passed through three stages during the century: the reign of orthodoxy, the attack on orthodoxy, and the passing of orthodoxy. This general drift was met by cross-currents of pietism, Unitarianism, Evangelism, Pantheism, and Hellenism. Here is a rich field for the would-be or the genuine philosophical poet.

III

This review of well-known facts concerning the thought of the nineteenth century has been necessary in order to establish a feeling for the enveloping atmosphere in which Tennyson was to follow the pursuit of poetry. Two conclusions emerge. Tennyson was by nature an artist pure and simple; and the prevailing influences of his life were such as would tempt him to use his art in the interest of morality and religion. Seldom has a poet been so snowed under by schools, isms, movements, and the ferment of conflicting ideals. The question is, Will he have imagination enough to leaven the stodgy lump of fact and idea? Will he feel called upon to leaven it? The answer can be found only by studying his works.

But a few straws may be noted from the Memoir. Of his temper at Cambridge his son writes:

The narrowness and dryness of the ordinary course of study at Cambridge, the lethargy there and absence of any teaching that grappled with the ideas of the age and stimulated and guided thought on the subjects of deepest human interest, had stirred my father to wrath. He cried aloud for "some soldier-priest, no Sabbath drawler of old saws" to set the world aright. But however gloomy his own view and that of his contemporaries was then as to the present, my father clearly saw "The Day-beam new-risen O'er awakened Albion." Indeed now as always, he was one of those on the lookout for every new idea and every old idea with a new application "which may tend to meet the growing requirements of society."[1]

Among the unpublished pieces written at Cambridge, To Poesie may be considered an anticipation of The Poet which appeared in 1830. Here he states his belief that the poet must be prophet as well as artist:

> Poesie shall bind
> Falsehood beneath the altar of great truth.[2]

In The Poet he is to be seer as well as singer. After the appearance of the volume of 1832, the Memoir states that Tennyson began to base his poetry more "on the broad, common interests of the time and of universal humanity, although "it was no doubt harder to idealize such themes than those that appealed mostly to the imagination." As to the influence of his Cambridge friends and the critics, his biographer continues:

My father pondered all that had been said and--after a period of utter prostration from grief and many dark fits of despondency--his passionate love of truth, of nature, and of humanity, drove him to work again with a deeper and fuller insight into the requirements of his age.[3]

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 66.
2 Ibid., p. 60.
3 Ibid., p. 123.

After the appearance of the volume of 1842, the following comment is made:

> My father's comprehension of life had grown; and the new poems dealt with an extroardinarily wide range of subjects, chivalry, duty, reverence, self-control, human passion, human love, the love of country, science, philosophy, simple faith and the many complex moods of the religious nature.[1]

At this point caution must be observed. Tennyson's youthful utterances on the mission of the poet must not be taken too seriously. They indicate that he will be more susceptible to didactic influences than Keats or Poe. Further than that, they may be regarded as the infiltration of the Zeitgeist. As to the deepening thoughtfulness of the volumes of 1842, this must be said: It will be unfair to construe every leaning of Tennyson toward giving intellectual content to his poetry or toward representing the thought of his day, as didacticism. It is necessary, however, with reference to both these points to have as complete a record as possible of what influences played upon him and what was passing in his mind. The facts are that these influences constituted an external pressure motivated by utilitarian aims, and that Tennyson was somewhat susceptible to them. Going back to the young poet of 1830 and trying to forecast his future, we may say that he cannot go on forever describing pretty maidens and etching delicate landscapes. But the question is: as his development proceeds, will he, in spite of external pressure, have the detachment to release his intellect from all service and allow it "to take its direction from its own celestial fire?"

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 188.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FLOWERING OF ARTISTIC GIFTS

I

In the light of these conclusions as to Tennyson's natural gifts and the influences which played upon him,his total product must now be examined with a view to discovering how dar the artist in him suffered from utilitarian aims and practice.

For this purpose it will be best to divide his productive period into two subdivisions,the first from 1827,the date of the publication of Poems by Two Brothers,through 1842,the date at which appeared the two volumes which made him famous. In this period Tennyson's creative impulse flowered naturally and with great exuberance. In this period he perfected his technique and experimented with a wide range of themes and metrical forms. The second period extends from 1847,the date of the appearance of The Princess to the end of his life in 1892. In this period he created nothing new. He continued to maintain the temper of the craftsman through the pursuit of perfection in form and painstaking revision,but his mind was turned outward more upon his world,with the result that he became,so far as poetry is concerned, the spokesman of his age.

The present chapter deals with the first period. After a re-examination of Tennyson's conception of the mission of poetry and a survey of his artistic development,a study will be made of the didactic tendencies in this period with a glance at his

intellectual advance and his successful treatment of ideas as material for poetry.

At the opening of his poetic career Tennyson nailed his thesis to the door.[1] The poet is a seer. He is bravely furnished to fling forth the winged shafts of truth. His mind is to kindle the minds of many. There is to be meaning to his words. But this theory of poetry is scarcely in harmony with his practice in the period before us. More accurately speaking,it is not so much a lack of harmony as a difference of outlook. The actual interest of the young poet through these first years lies in the realm of pure beauty. For the most part he is occupied with images,poetic concepts,and matters of form pertaining to the musical accompaniment which he considers essential. When he does speak of the calling of the poet,he accepts uncritically the attitude which would be approved by the lady who was the subject of Isabel,by his fellow "Apostles,"and later by orthodox Victorians. It must be noted,too,that his description of the poet as

> Dowered with the hate of hate,the scorn of scorn,
> The love of love [2]

is that of a rather mild-tempered singer. One can think of a number of poets,say Dante,Moliere,Byron,Shelley who could not qualify as to the scorn of scorn. But the lines express Tennyson. His view of what the poet should be and do is conventional. It is not a profound conviction. He has not the daring of Keats much less that of the wrong-headed decadents. He may,how-

1 Works,The Poet,p.14.
2 Ibid.

ever, be attacking Keats in the introduction to The Palace of Art. There he states that the poem is an allegory of a sinful soul possessing many gifts,

> That did love beauty--only beauty seen
> In all varieties of mould and mind--
> And knowledge for its beauty; or if good,
> Good only for its beauty, seeing not
> That Beauty, Good, and Knowledge are three sisters
> That doat upon each other, friends to man,
> Living together under the same roof,
> And never can be sundered without tears.[1]

But even if Tennyson's conception of the function of the poet is unoriginal and unenthusiastic, we must remember that some such idea does lie in the back of his mind and that it may possibly show its head in the heat of a poetic conception or in the actual throes of composition. A priori, one would say that it would be most apt to impair the quality of his work by motivating his practice in general as if he should say, "Go to. If I am to be a poet, I must uplift my fellow-men, and it is time I set about it." It is not maintained here that his conception of poetry is either right or wrong; only that he holds it with no earnestness, is not interested in it. Perhaps he has no need to be.

What actually happens in the fifteen years under consideration is a commonplace of Tennysonian criticism. Nevertheless, it is rather startling to one who is on the scent of the didactic. For didacticism is hard to find. To read this poetry at a sitting is to get the impression of that superabundance of the creative.

1 Works, p.42. The spelling is Tennyson's.

imagination which is only found in the poet born. In subject-matter here is God's plenty; girl portraits,not very subtle but showing spontaneous fertility in expression,medieval legends and classic myths retold,songs,idyls of country life,pure imaginative sketches,patriotism,humor,religious ecstasy,the lyric of personal sorrow,reflective pieces gaining in power from the youthful efforts to the deeply moving Ulysses or the acid St. Simeon Stylites. As to his range in literary types,here again we have the spectacle of the artist delighting to find himself as he tries his powers in ballad,song,sonnet,ode,monologue,expository dialog,epic,pageant,satire. Equally extended is his range in metrical forms. Besides the usual patterns,we find him making experiments with the stanza of In Memoriam,ranging in such an out-of the-way corner as the Maollakat for the rhythm of Locksley Hall,trying onomatapoetic effects for the sheer music of them,outdoing Wordsworth in his use of the diction of everyday life,perfecting in Morte D'Arthur a blank verse which he never surpassed.[1]

One notes,too, the progress from the beginning of the period to the close--very swift between 1827 and 1830,indeed marking a phenomenal advance from the Byronic volume of the early date to the book which contained Mariana,Sea Fairies,The Poet, and The Dying Swan. After 1830 the development was less swift but steady. This progress as well as the quality of his output was due in part to the spirit of the man. How self-forgetting

1 Fitzgerald was outspoken in the view that Tennyson's later work never equalled the poems of this period. Criticism in general accords to this poetry originality and creative power.

he was yet how determined to be himself. How independent,how sure of his gift,how willing to be solitary. The Trinity boys found it hard to get at him,hard to get a letter from him as he brooded there in London or at Epping Forest. The critical faculty was also hard at work as he began self-discipline,a teachable listening to the reviewers,patient revision,and the ruthless suppression of the second-rate.[1]

So much for the temper of the man and the quality of his work. So much for pure Beauty. But what shall be said for the two sisters,Goodness and Knowledge? That the didactic element is hard to find in this period does not mean that Tennyson did not perpetrate any poetry in this vein or that he did not feel the pull of it and sometimes make a narrow escape. The first thing to be noted is his tendency to use a form which has too often been the medium of didacticism--allegory. For this he found ample warrant in his English predecessors. Allegory being in point of style a sustained metaphor or simile,it is open to the danger of artificiality. Being in point of subject-matter a supposed event or series of events which teach a lesson,it is exposed to the danger of turning an art form into a homily. Our criteria,therefore,for detecting didacticism in allegory are the

1 There are few poems of this period which have not been subjected to textual emendation. The Memoir contains good poetry which Tennyson did not think fit to publish. Thirty-two numbers from Poems Chiefly Lyrical were suppressed. Later the following were restored; The Deserted House, Nothing will Die,All things will Die,Elegiacs,We are Free,Sea Fairies,The Kraken,National Song. Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind. A poem which was never restored because Tennyson thought it sensuous and commonplace was included by Emerson in his anthology,Parnassus.The poem is Hero to Leander.

same as those for detecting it in any other type of literature. The best course will be to apply the Hegelian dicta,looking for that fusion of inner concept to outer form,remembering that "art can be employed in the didactic poem only on what concerns the external and that reality and spiritual explanation must not be developed in complete separation and artificially fitted together. Specifically we may ask in a given case,Have we the informational,the meretricious,the platitudinous,the moralizing,the heavy and unassimilated?

Further light on the relation of didacticism to allegory may be gained by recognizing that allegory may exist on either of two levels. There is the naive,child-like form which is illustrated by fable,bestiary,morality play,or by the ground-work of the Faerie Queen. Then there is the more subtle and mature allegory which comes in the fullness of a literary development or from the mind of genius. Such allegories are The Divine Comedy, Pilgrim's Progress,Gullivar's Travels. The former type delights in the simile and carries it out in detail. In it the moral aim is explicit and insistent. It appeals to an undeveloped literary taste. In the latter type the metaphor is organic,growing out of the theme inevitably. Its moral is implicit and never insistent. Ruskin's distinction between the imagination and the fancy is pertinent here.[1] Like his Fancy,the naive allegory deals with the external and obvious. Like his Imagination,the mature allegory goes to the heart of a matter and delights by its suggestiveness. The special value of both types is to clothe an ab-

1 Modern Painters,Vol.II,p.315,Everyman.

straction in the concreteness of story or picture. The fatal flaw is dullness owing to the length of the simile which induces weariness in carrying out the parallel, or to the directness of the homiletic appeal.

Throughout his career Tennyson showed a marked liking for allegory. In this first period he used it with considerable frequency. As might be expected of one not too far away from the eighteenth century with its flair for personified abstractions, the young Tennyson drifted into the use of allegory, being, one would say, in no way influenced by external pressure or the desire to teach, but feeling his way about among the instruments of expression, sometimes awkwardly and on the whole in imitative fashion. As a rule these juvenile efforts have no trace of didactic intent. Such are the fanciful Tears of Heaven, The Burial of Love, Love and Sorrow and the Elizabethan imitations.[1] Such also are the playful allegories, Love, Pride, and Forgetfulness of 1832 and and the Death of the Old Year of 1842. Of the last two we note in passing the superiority of the latter as an indication of the marked development which characterized the poet through this first period. In these early attempts it is significant that in using a form which had from ancient times been a medium of moral instruction, we see everywhere cropping out a quality which has been emphasized as dominant in Tennyson's art-genius--the pictorial and statuesque:

> His eyes in eclipse,
> Pale-cold his lips,

1 Works, pp. 781-789. These were published in 1832 and suppresed.

The light of his hopes unfed,
Mute his tongue,
With his bow unstrung,
With the tears he has shed,
Backward drooping his graceful head,
Love is dead.[1]

Worn Sorrow sits by the moaning wave
Beside her are laid
Her mattock and spade.[2]

But Hatred in a gold cave sits below,
Pleached with her hair of argent light.
Shot into gold,a snake her forhead clips.[3]

If this indicates anything,it is that in the first skirmish of the conflict art wins.

With more definite intention,he uses ideas as the basis of the allegory in the early poem,Love. A more uneven poem it would be hard to find. We should not expect that a youth of twenty-one would never deviate into crudeness. The second half of the poem in which love is compared to a snake doffing its skin and rushing forth with "a merry din" and appearing later with a crown upon his brow,must have moved Christopher North to mirth. But the first half of the poem has merit. Here we have an impassioned hymn in which form and content are completely assimilated. The figure,Love, is spiritualized and invested with imaginative beauty. The Platonism of the thought is fitted to a quiet,lovely rhythm,and the piece rises to the climax:

Come thou of many crowns,white-robed Love.

and still ascending in the superb:

1 Works,p.781.
2 Ibid.,p.781.
3 Ibid.,p.785.

Breathe on thy winged throne, and it shall move
In music and in light o'er land and sea.[1]

If the poem ended here, it might be a not unworthy companion piece to Spenser's Hymn to Heavenly Love.

This successful use of allegory to teach in art's way is parallelled by one other poem of the juvenilia, Timbuctoo, the prize poem written in 1829. Here we have the vision form of allegory. Although the poem as a whole is extravagant, what lies at the heart of it has the authentic note of true poetry. The Seraph who appears to him in the vision is the spirit which courses through "the intricate and labyrinthine vine of Fable." The conception is poetic, unusual. The passage in which this idea is couched is well-done. The allegory has organic reality. The metaphor with which he concludes is unexpectedly original. It expresses the thought that science will destroy the myths in which the hopes and fears of man have found refuge. We may compare the lines of Tennyson with a similar idea as Keats expressed it:

Do not all charms fly
At the mere touch of cold philosophy?
There was an awful rainbow once in heaven;
We know her woof, her texture; she is given
In the dull catalogue of common things.
Philosophy will clip an angel's wings,
Conquer all mysteries by rule and line,
Empty the haunted air and gnomed mine.[2]

O city! O latest throne! where I was raised
To be a mystery of loveliness
Unto all eyes, the time has come
When I must render up this glorious home
To keen Discovery; soon yon brilliant towers
Shall darken with the waving of her wand;
Darken and shrink and shiver into huts,

1 Works, p.785.
2 John Keats, The Poems, Everyman Edition, p.148.

Black specks amid a dreary waste of land, [1]
Low-built, mud-walled, barbarian settlements.

The passage from Keats is better known and more memorable because more downright. But Tennyson has done well, attaining power by the ugly thrust of realism, and it is surprising that he should have thought to do it.

Equally successful is the allegory in The Poet. For the central conception he has taken a leap. Wisdom is not an end in itself but the handmaid of Freedom. "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" is a much neglected aspect of the philosophy of Jesus, and it is a little surprising to note this gleam of humanism in the days of the Regency. The form in which Tennyson has expressed this idea has the inevitable quality which makes it seem the only fit expression. Sublimity does not seem too strong a word for the sweep of the climaxes which rise to the breath-taking images of lightning and thunder

riving the spirit of man,
Making earth wonder.[2]

Then follows the falling cadence with the surprise in the closing revelation. Here again as in the case of the Seraph in Timbuctoo, we have the statuesque quality which Tennyson, it seems, could not let alone.

That The Lady of Shalott may be considered as an allegory we have Tennyson's word. To Canon Ainger he said, "It may be a parable of the poetic nature clashing with the world."[3] One sus-

1 Works, p.780.
2 Ibid., p.14.
3 Memoir, Vol.I, p.80.

pects that this is a later idea of Tennyson which he mistakenly ascribes to his thought while composing the poem. If it be an allegory,it is the artistic type with veiled application which pleases the modern reader. But the poem considered as a rendering of the sweet,sad,medieval legend is more satisfying than the most artistic suggestion of the noblest truth. And the frame of mind which would lead an author to try to find a lesson in such a poem is the didactic frame of mind.

Two notable examples of Tennyson's use of allegory in the volumes of 1842 are The Palace of Art and The Vision of Sin. In these poems more than in any so far considered,the author appears in the unmistakable guise of teacher. The inception of The Palace of Art in 1832 was,we are told, due to Trench who said one day, "Tennyson,we cannot live in art." The poet's comment on the meaning of the allegory was, "It is the embodiment of my own belief that the God-like life is with man and for man."[1] This sounds pietistic and is not exactly what the poem seems to teach. Besides it is not in keeping with the spirit of an earlier remark. Of the interest which the poem excited,he wondered "why people treasure the rubbish I shot from my full-furnished cantos."[2] From this we infer that the moral conviction was not so deep after all. However that may be, the interest in the poem which led its author to revise it more frequently than any other was artistic. Van Dyke calls the poem an "aesthetic protest against aestheticism cism."[3] But it is doubtful whether the author at this early per-

1 Memoir, Vol.I,p.118.
2 Ibid.,p. 85.
3 Henry Van Dyke,The Poetry of Tennyson,p.32.

iod anticipated the later controversies on this aspect of art. The most natural conclusion is that of common sense. At this time Tennyson is in the hey-day of his extravagant love of sensuous beauty and has a vigorous and fertile impulse to objectify it. He sees in the theme opportunity for tapestry and mosaic, and off he goes. The central idea could have been presented in a much shorter poem and would thus have more fully illustrated the Aristotelian requirements of structure. And Tennyson has a prejudice against "long-backed poems." But he makes this poem long because he wishes to indulge in landscape and pageantry.

The theme is flatly didactic and in the presentation is as patent as a moral could well be. And yet such is the beauty of the imaginative treatment and the musical accompaniment, that the poem escapes the dullness of homily. The emotional climax is considerable, and the outcome seems a dramatic necessity. If we wish to get a full sense of the way of art in presenting a moral, we have only to read the last two stanzas of this poem and compare them with the preachment in Coleridge's Ancient Mariner.[1] Just so

1 So when four years were wholly finished
She threw her royal robes away.
"Make me a cottage in the vale," she said,
"Where I may mourn and pray.

"Yet pull not down my palace towers, that are
So lightly, beautifully built;
Perchance I may return with others there
When I have purged away my guilt."
Tennyson.

He prayeth best who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us
He made and loveth all.
Coleridge.

in the little poem, The Voyage. Here the moral lesson that we should always have an ideal has been so smelted and remolded in the imagination of the poet that we can enjoy the piece as a consummate sea song. But the glory of the successful allegory is that while we delight in story and picture, we do not fail to make the moral application which the poem profoundly suggests. But we may accord Tennyson a special triumph in the Palace of Art by reason of what we may call the allegories in miniature which it contains. Max Eastman has written of the diffuse or elaborated metaphor over which the poet has lingered as if loth to withdraw his thought.[1] On the other hand there are metaphors over which he has not lingered, but the very potency of which lies in their suggestion, their capacity for expansion. For example, what a story for the mind to complete lies back of the brief words of the Parable of the Lost Sheep! Quite similar in its compression is Tennyson's three-fold parable in this poem in which the solitary soul is likened to a dull spot of stagnation in an onward moving world; to a salt pool that hears always the plunging sea; to a motionless star midst in infinity of whirling spheres. Still greater power is achieved in the dark story which the following stanzas leave unexpressed:

> O god-like isolation which art mine,
> I can but count thee perfect gain,
> What time I watch the darkening droves of swine
> That range on yonder plain.
>
> In filthy sloughs they roll a prurient skin,
> They graze and wallow, breed and sleep;
> And oft some brainless devil enters in,
> And drives them to the deep.[2]

1 Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Poetry, New York, 1922, pp. 66-88.
2 Works, p. 45.

Equally triumphant is Tennyson's use of allegory in The Vision of Sin. A young poet, giving himself up to sensuality descends by degrees to cynicism, blasphemy, and utter beastliness. This intractable material is handled in two contrasting pictures. The orgy which follows upon the entrance of the poet to the palace shows the influence of Vathek, but like Poe in The Mask of the Red Death, Tennyson escapes the bizarre through brevity. Here we see Tennyson using the grotesque with artistic insight. He attains tragic power in the Nemesis which, unheeded by the sensualist, slowly and inexorably moves onward until it touches the palace gate and is now unheeded by the God who has "made himself an awful rose of dawn."

In a final consideration, then, of Tennyson's use of allegory in this period, we must exonerate him from perpetrating those faults which were all too common in the type. He has taken for a number of poems a mold which had been the vehicle for the most flagrant didacticism and turned it to imaginative ends. Nor can it be objected that he was forsaking the realm of art to write on such themes as the value of service, the duty of having ideals and the blighting effects of sensuality. Any theme may be chosen so it be treated poetically. His work at this stage has the moral emphasis of his race, but so far as allegory is concerned, we cannot arraign him further.[1]

II

One other poem of the period must be examined, Love Thou Thy Land. Here the poet does not come off so well. In fact in a num-

1 Two successful allegories not included in the discussion were The Deserted House, good but slight, and Freedom.

ber of stanzas the homiletic intent has done its worst. The youth has certain fine ideas about national life which are creditable and which in his day were not so current as they are now. He enjoins the nation to hold to the best traditions of the past, to make haste slowly, to elect the ablest men to office, to educate the people, to avoid slogans, to see good in the enemy, to give free play to discussion, and above all to advance by evolution rather than by revolution. It is small wonder that he could not control this material. Such a heavy load of raw concepts was sure to break the back of Pegasus. The following stanzas are as bad as anything in Nosce Teipsum or Night Thoughts:

> For nature also cold and warm
> And moist and dry, devising long
> Through many agents making strong
> Matures the individual form.
>
> Meet is it changes should control
> Our being lest we rust in ease.
> We all are changed by slow degrees
> All but the basis of the soul.[1]

When he does succeed, it is through metrical effects or his ability to create the memorable phrase. A few such can be found in this poem, "dogs of faction," "The herd, wild hearts and feeble wings that every sophister can lime." As in Wordsworth's Happy Warrior, the didactic intent is unmistakable. But Wordsworth is more successful because he is doing a portrait, and personality may always be invested with beauty. But it was more than Tennyson could manage to endow with beauty the spirit which should underly national policy.

1 Works, p.61.

III

To close the study of this period at this point must seem to leave it glaringly incomplete;for some of the most thoughtful poems Tennyson ever wrote have not been considered. Through the natural maturing of his mind,through personal sorrow,through wide reading and much solitary brooding,Tennyson's nature was greatly enriched. Very early we have The Supposed Confessions of a Second-rate Sensitive Mind. But the results of the oncoming maturity are best illustrated by Ulysses,Locksley Hall,The Two Voices,St.Simeon Stylites,and Morte D'Arthur. These poems reveal such a growing mastery in the use of the intellectual element as legitimate material for poetry that the full treatment of this phase of the subject must be made in connection with the later poems. In like manner the study so far reveals much exeellent satire. Since this aspect of Tennyson's poetry has seldom been tpuched on by his interpreters, it must receive special emphasis. This can best be done when the record is complete.

The study of the didactic element in Tennyson's first period has resulted in the following conclusions: His belief that the poet should be a teacher did not hamper his genius at this time;the period is marked by a brilliant out burst of poetry showing a wide range of subject matter,literary types,and poetical forms; he has used frequently a didactic mode,allegory,without being didactic; his one failure was in the patriotic poem, Love Thou Thy Land; he has used satire and ideas with marked success; there is a notable deepening of the moral earnestness of the Anglo-Saxon race.

CHAPTER SIX

LEGEND AND HISTORY

I

The gradual enrichment of Tennyson's thought during his first period has been noted in a previous chapter. In addition to the thoughtful poems mentioned there, some of the elegies which were to appear in In Memoriam belong also to this period. After 1847 the poems were no longer "chiefly lyrical." Although he did not give the world new ideas, he did through these years interpret most effectively the thought of his age. Current ideas in a world of intense intellectual excitement together with his personal struggles over the supposed conflict between science and religion, were to find expression more and more in his poems. Other circumstances contributed to make Tennyson the spokesman of his age. The last infirmity of noble minds overtook him. The volumes of 1842 had brought him into a blaze of light. In Memoriam with its consoling hope won for him the love of multitudes who were battling with the perplexities for which he there found an apparent solution. His position as Poet Laureate, his relations with the Queen and the Prince Consort, his friendship with the greatest Englishmen of his day, combined to make him a great figure. Consequently an idealization of the poet set in. As a result, Tennyson, perhaps unconsciously, shifted his interest from that immediacy of the artist's vision which is so much a

matter of the inner self to the outer world where he was to be occupied with problems of individual and social conduct and where the ferment of ideas had never in any time been more provocative to literary men. He began to deal with these ideas. Although the lyric gift was not lost,he began to think more and about problems of the social world.

As interpreter of the ideals and folkways of Victorian England he found two life-currents which would serve to carry the new ideas--the Past and the Present. The myths of ancient Greece and the legends of the Celtic world had attracted him as a young poet as evinced by Ulysses,Tithonus,Oenone,by Sir Galahad and the Morte D'Arthur. Another fascinating field was the history of his country. Now with a new thoughtfulness he sees that this old material is full of implicit meanings and elusive vistas. By using it a poet could bring to focus intense and significant aspects of life. Then,too, there was the living Present. The Europe of Tennyson's day could have furnished themes for a great philosophical poet. Within these two realms can be comprehended much of the thoughtful poetry of his second period.

Tennyson's early use of Celtic material gave the lyrics, Sir Galahad,The Lady of Shalott,and Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere and the epic fragment,Morte D'Arthur. Late in life appeared the extravaganza, The Voyage of Maeldune, and last of all the literary autobiography,Merlin and the Gleam. But the outstanding example of Tennyson's use of legend is The Idylls of the King.

II

Much of the comment on Tennyson's didacticism is based on his treatment of the Arthurian story. One of the earliest protests came from Fitzgerald who had not liked The Princess and In Memoriam. On the appearance of the Idylls of 1859 he declared that Tennyson should have stopped with the volume of 1842, "leaving The Princess, Ardens, and Idylls all unborn."[1] H.C.grierson lamented the didactic intent of the series and other poems of the period and thought that "the sole justification for rehandling the legends was the possibility of giving them a new and heightened poetic beauty and dramatic significance."[2] Lyall complained that his world is "neither ancient nor modern, but a fairyland peopled with knights and dames whose habits and conversation are adjusted to the decorus manner of the nineteenth century."[3] The publication of the series of 1859 while it elicited praise from many critics found detractors among the aesthetes who were beginning to shy at a moral significance in any work of art. A stanza, "Art for Art's sake" was Tennyson's answer.

> Art for Art's sake! Hail truest Lord of Hell!
> Hail, Genius, Master of the Mortal Will.
> "The filthiest of all paintings painted well
> Is mightier than the purest painted ill!"
> Yes, mightier than the purest painted well.
> So prone are we toward the broad way to Hell.[4]

1 Edward Fitzgerald, Letters, New York, 1894, p.206.
2 The Tennysons, Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol.XIII, p.41.
3 Tennyson, p.101.
4 Memoir, Vol.II, p.92.

Amusing is the view of W.Macneile Dixon who believed that Tennyson was distressed by the morals of Lancelot. "And how significant it is," he continued, "that with the most famous and wonderful of all the legends,the story of Tristram and Isolt,he could do nothing. Paralyzed by Victorian sentiment,this,the passionate rose of the medieval romance,the most elemental and moving,the most lovely and pathetic of all tales of love,falls from his hands, the peerless story which lives by inextinguishable affection. His mind misgave him,for it was lawless."[1] Swinburne and Harrison were the most violent critics of all. The former who admired Tennyson's other work,and well he might,for his own manner was nothing if not Tennysonian,jestingly called the poems "The Morte D'Albert" or "The Idylls of the Prince Consort."[2] Harrison declared that the author had "emasculated the fierce,lusty epic," Referring to the background of castle and tourney,he found the tone of the poems incongruous:

> In the midst of so much realism the knights from Arthur downward talk and act in ways with which we are familiar in modern ethical and pscychological novels,but which are as impossible in real medieval knights as a Bengal tiger or a polar bear would be in a drawing-room.

As for the ladies,he accused them of "soul-bewildering casuistry like that of the women in Middlemarch."[3]

The character of Arthur especially has been the subject of criticism:

1 English Epic and Heroic Poetry,New York,1912,p.312.
2 Quoted in Van Dyke,op.cit.,pp.172-173.
3 Harrison,op.cit.,pp.14-46.

Arthur has become a symbol,not a human being...he is the embodiment of complete virtue conceived in Victorian fashion with a little too much of the"endless clergyman."

H.C.Grierson.[1]

The blameless king is vapid...A little blameworthiness would do him a world of good. We long for some of the blessed evil of Browning.

Hugh Walker.[2]

The excellent Arthur lacks tragic quality; he does not interest us sufficiently,while there is even something tame from the dramatic point of view in his high-minded generosity toward Guinevere.

Sir Alfred Lyall.[3]

He is too perfect for perfection. Tennyson either meant to paint a man who had never had any conflict in himself which is impossible; or he intended to exhibit a man in whom the conflict had been fought out,in which case Arthur surely would have shown some of the scars of conflict,shown some sense of personal imperfection, manifested a deeper feeling.

Henry Van Dyke.[4]

The introduction of allegory has had its share of criticism. It is the opinion of Dixon that Tennyson paid dearly for his allegory in the sacrifice of the marvellous:

Tennyson appears at a serious disadvantage beside Spenser who knew that as Bacon said,without a touch of strangeness there is no excellent beauty,with whom the allegory is secondary to the miracle. The expulsion of the pagan element--necessary,perhaps in the interest of the Christian interpretation--abates the curiosity with which one followed the old and true romance,which is nothing if it be not a house of adventure,a banquet of surprise.[5]

But it is quite possible to enjoy the romances without recognizing the allegory,and this is the course recommended by Littledale:

Without meaning to depreciate the moral significance in a work of art,it may,nevertheless,be a question whether we should

1 Op.cit.,p.40.
2 The Literature of the Victorian Age,London,1913,p.393.
3 Op.cit.,p.101.
4 Op.cit.,p.211.
5 English Epic and Heroic Poetry,pp.311-312.

attach any very great importance to the emblematical significance of this noble poem...The time when allegory and parable could fruitfully teach mankind has long gone past,and the moral lessons of the Idylls must come from their noble song of heroic aspiration and tragic failure,from their representation of the Nemesis that overtakes the sinner,and not from their shadowing Sense at war with Soul,and still less from their cities built to music and men in hardened skins and blooming boys under the mask of death.[1]

From these comments it will be seen that the charge of didacticism as it refers to these poems is concerned with the modernizing of the material,the character of King Arthur,and the use of allegory. Tennyson has not lacked defenders on two of these points. Andrew Lang in 1909 protested against the attack of Harrison. To his mind the epic as Tennyson found it in Malory was neither fierce nor lusty. As to Harrison's objection that Tennyson had introduced gentleness,courtesy,and conscience into literature where such qualities were unknown,he replied, "I must confess myself ignorant of any early or primitive literature in which human virtues and the human conscience do not play a part."[2] Henry Van Dyke has given an excellent answer to those critics who object to Tennyson's modernizing his material,pointing out that from the beginning the Arthurian legends have been treated in the same way. "There was no more necessity that Tennyson should be true to Malory than that Malory should be true to Walter Map."[3] As to the elevating of the characters Van Dyke thus justifies Tennyson;

Every poet of first rank has idealized--or rather let us say vitalized--his characters in giving them the thoughts and feelings

1 Harold Littledale,Essays on Lord Tennyson's Idylls of the King,New York,1907,p.296.
2 Alfred Tennyson,New York,1909,p.101.
3 Van Dyke,op.cit.,p.180.

which he has experienced or known through living contact with men and women of his own day. Thus Homer vitalized Ulysses, Shakespeare, Hamlet, Virgil, Aeneas, Milton, Satan, and Goethe, Faust.[1]

Not only have characters been so treated, but theme and background have been transformed to bring them nearer to the understanding of the author's readers. Thus Vergil Romanized the Greek legends and made them the text for idealizing Augustus and exalting the empire. Chaucer in Troilus and Cresayde turned the Greek and Trojan heroes into medieval knights. Shakespeare Anglicized his Plutarch and brought his North and Holinshed up to the date of Elizabethan England. As to the idealizing of a hero, it would be hard to out-Vergil Vergil whose pious Aeneas has been criticized for the very quality which Tennyson has given to Arthur. And Shakespeare's Henry V is a thought too perfect for "human nature's daily food."

But something further should be said on the modernizing of legendary material, from the standpoint of the conditions of human progress and the nature of art. An illustration from history is convincing. The simplicity of the early Christian church was completely transformed through the ceremony and ecclesiasti-

1 Van Dyke, op.cit., p.183.

2 In the Morte D'Arthur written in 1834, published in 1842, expressions occur in the induction which indicate that Tennyson was even then turning over in his mind problems about the poetic use of legendary subject-matter. The poet is represented as having burnt his epic and gives as a reason, "a truth looks freshest in the fashions of the day," "and why should any man remodel models?" By 1872 he was convinced that it was right to modernize the story. In the epilogue To the Queen he says definitely that he is not portraying the King Arthur of Geoffrey or Malory. He shows lack of discernment in characterizing Arthur's time as "hovering between war and wantonness and crownings and dethronements." Of course there are things in Malory that are "not nice." But if a man sees only so far, he is warped by the new "decorum."

cism which it took on as it spread through the Roman Empire. This was not to be deplored says Santayana, for only so could it meet the needs of the new world;

> That society had found in Christianity a last love, a rejuvenating, supersensible hope and had bequeathed to the Gospel of Redemption for its better embodiment and ornament all its own wealth of art, philosophy, and devotion...Yet it was only by virtue of this complement inherited from Paganism...that Christianity could claim to approach a human universality or to achieve an imaginative adequacy."[1]

A similar process is involved in the nature of a work of art. If a given material be not plastic enough to be molded into new forms in accordance with the particular slant of a new race or a new age, it is not material for art.[2] In particular the fluent nature of legendary material, partaking as it does of the unshaped matter of life, will be subjected to changes and additions from age to age. In this process it will sometimes be marred by excrescences and inconsistencies; and then again in the hands of a more gifted bard will be rounded out with beautiful and significant detail; still later makers will perfect the story. In the light of these views and from the example of great writers it is reasonable to conclude that Tennyson had a right to deduce from the Arthurian story as much beauty and power as are implicit in it. This would involve selection, invention, transformation.

1 George Santayana, Interpretations of Poetry and Religion. New York, 1900, pp. 113-114.

2 "New ages appropriate the work of the past by accomplishing a partial transformation in them, and unless art is capable of such remaking, it cannot last." George E. Woodberry in Essay on Aesthetic Criticism. Woodberry Society, 1913.

II

In spite of the fact that the Idylls of the King have so frequently been disparaged as being marred by Tennyson's feeling of responsibility as a teacher of his age,no detailed study y of this aspect of the poem has as yet been made. A rather full account of the evolution of the series can be pieced out from the Memoir. A good summary may be found in the Cambridge edition of the complete works. It will,therefore,be necessary to restate only such facts as will bring to focus Tennyson's state of mind in the inception and progress of the work. There is no evidence that Tennyson,widely read as he was,knew the continental treatment of the subject other than the work of Chretien de Troyes. Nor do we know for certain how much he knew of what his English predecessors had done. He did know his Malory and the Mabinogion.[1] In the English field there was a-plenty he could have known in the way of reference and renderings of various parts of the story Spenser was Tennyson's most significant predecessor,for with him the moral is unmistakable. Arthur is to typify Magnificence, or the comprehension of all virtues--patently an allegorical device in accordance with Spenser's purpose "to fashion a gentleman in vertuous and gentle discipline."

Whatever Tennyson knew of the work of his predecessors,the subject had fascinated him at a very early age,as we learn from the Memoir. "The vision of Arthur as I have drawn him came upon

1 Good surveys of previous treatment of the Arthurian legends are by Gustavus H.Maynadier,Harold Littledale,andM.W Maccallum. See bibliography.

me when little more than a boy I first lighted upon Malory."[1] "At twenty-four I meant to write an epic or drama of King Arthur, and I thought that I should twenty years about the work."[2] He believed that there is no grander subject in the world for a poem. During fifty odd years he wrote on this theme four lyrics, a Homeric fragment, an autobiographical allegory, and a romance-sequence in twelve books. Prose narratives were found in his notebooks two of which appear in the Memoir. He outlined a plan for an opera in five acts. The Lady of Shalott appeared in 1832 and Merlin and the Gleam in 1889, to give the extreme dates.

Tennyson's method of composition seems to have been impulsive and irregular. Two circumstances would seem to work against a unified performance. In the first place, he did not write the separate poems in the order demanded by a logical plot, but as Van Dyke says, "beginning with the end, ending with the beginning and continuing with the middle."[3] In the second place, the first four Idylls, then entitled Enid, Vivien, Elaine, and Guinevere, which made the edition of 1859, were written for the sake of the narrative, having no spiritual meaning, although as Jowett observed, an allegory could be discerned in the distance.[4] After ten years, on the publication of The Holy Grail and Other Poems, it is clear that the author intended to give the whole series a moral significance. In the edition of 1872 the epilogue, To the Queen, is added in which the theme is definitely stated to be the conflict between Sense and Soul. Early Idylls were in this edition revised

1 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 129.
2 Ibid., Vol. II, p. 89.
3 Van Dyke, op. cit., p. 156.
4 Memoir, Vol. I, p. 449.

with this theme in mind. In a footnote to the Holy Grail and Other Poems Tennyson gave the order in which the poems should henceforth be read and in which he referred to the series as an "early project of the author's."[1] From this it would appear that Tennyson had very early conceived of the separate poems as unified in some way. Nor was the introduction of a theme an after thought as it appears to be. In 1869 Tennyson gave to Knowles, then editor of The Contemporary Review, a manuscript which he said had been written between twenty or thirty years previously. It was a scheme for an allegorical treatment of the Arthurian legends in which The Round Table should typify liberal institutions and the two Guineveres the Catholic and Protestant churches.[2]

We may suppose then, that the idea of giving the poems an ethical import came to Tennyson at an early period and gradually matured with the years. That he had a right to introduce a theme need not be argued. The greatest pieces of literature unless we accept the primitive epic are informed with meaning. The only question is, can he do it? Can he insert a theme after ten years and so work over the whole sequence that the result will not be wooden and artificial? If by so doing the poet impairs the artistic quality of the poems, that result will be pertinent to our inquiry.

A word should be said at this point as to how much unity

1 The order is, The Coming of Arthur, Geraint and Enid, Merlin and Vivien, Lancelot and Elaine, The Holy Grail, Pelleas and Etarre, Guinevere, The Passing of Arthur. In the edition of 1872 Gareth and Lynette and The Last Tournament were inserted in their present places. In 1885 Balin and Balan appeared as an introduction to Merlin and Vivien.

2 Memoir, Vol. II, pp. 123-124

the reader has a right to expect. The Idylls of the King do not form an epic; if they did, we should desire greater unity than Tennyson has secured. The poems constitute a romance-sequence which is as definite a type as the sonnet-sequence or such a novel-sequence as Galsworthy has produced in the Forsyte Saga. In the latter forms we can read the separate pieces with pleasure or we can enjoy the thread of meaning that runs through the series. Just so with the romance-sequence, the Idylls of the King.

But it is necessary to distinguish between theme and allegory. "There is nothing very recondite," says Littledale, "in such a moral significance; every great poem that truly reflects the spirit and movement of human life must consciously or unconsciously prefigure this conflict."[1] But the employment of a theme did not necessitate the use of allegory.[2] Here the final result must be its own justification.

III[3]

We have seen that Tennyson early showed a tendency to use allegory and that in his first period he was generally successful in avoiding the disadvantages common to the type. We have

1 Littledale, op.cit., p.55.
2 This seems obvious, but it is mentioned because Tennyson's critics sometimes use the term, "allegory," when they are simply referring to the spiritual teaching.
3 The following abbreviations will be used in citations from the Idylls in this chapter:

CA, The Coming of Arthur.
GL, Gareth and Lynette.
MG, The Marriage of Geraint.
GE, Geraint and Enid.
BB, Balin and Balan.
MV, Merlin and Vivien.
LE, Lancelot and Elaine.
HG, The Holy Grail.
PE, Pelleas and Etarre.
LT, The Last Tournament
G, Guinevere.
PA, The Passing of Arthur.

seen,too,that long before he set pen to the Idylls,he had outlined a scheme for treating the subject symbolically. In addition,the romances as Malory relates them were often allegorical.[1] It is not surprising,then, that when Tennyson decided to give meaning to the narratives,he chose to couch the central idea of a conflict between Sense and Soul in the framework of an allegory. There is no agreement among critics as to the extent to which the symbolism pervades the whole. There are those who find it negligible. Others believe that the poem is saturated with it. Without trying to read into the poem what could not have been in the mind of Tennyson when he wrote it,it will be possible to trace the allegory in its main manifestations.

The most definite use of the type is in those passages in which the author sets out to employ symbolism after the fashion of a designer. This has been referred to as the naive type because it appeals less to the cultivated reader. It is of a piece with those passages in which Malory shows a saintly hermit who explains the spiritual meaning of a knight's dream-vision. It is also the kind of symbolism used in architecture today. The form is illustrated by the description of the gate leading to Arthur's palace:

> And there was no gate like it under heaven,
> For barefoot on the keystone which was lined
> And rippled like an ever-fleeting wave,
> The Lady of the Lake stood; all her dress
> Wept from her sides as water flowing away;
> But like the Cross her great and goodly arms
> Stretched under all the cornice and upheld;

1 Sir Thomas Malory,Le Morte D'Arthur; Bk.XVI,chaps.viii and xiii give typical examples of allegory referring to the Quest of the Sangreal.

And drops of water fell from either hand;
And down from one a sword was hung, from one
A censer, either worn with wind and storm;
And o'er her breast floated the sacred fish;
And in the space to left of her and right,
Were Arthur's wars in weird devices done,
New things and old co-twisted as if Time
Were nothing, so inveterately, that men
Were giddy gazing there; and over all
High on the top were those three Queens, the friends
Of Arthur, who should help him in his need.[1]

It is fairly clear that the Lady of the Lake is Religion, and the Three Queens, the Christian graces, Love, Faith and Hope. There is the symbol of the Cross, the Sword of the Spirit, the incense of Holiness. Another passage of architectural symbolism is the description of the Hall of Camelot with its four great zones of sculpture representing the four stages of man's progress from savagery to the spiritual heights.[2] Pageant-like is the narrative of Gareth, the spirit of youth overcoming the destroying power of Time. In four episodes he contests with Morning-Star, Noon-Sun, Evening-Star, and Death.[3] Pageant-like is the story of the four trials of Percival whereby he learns the vanity of the physical appetites, earthly love, wealth, and power[4] These are so exquisite that it is difficult to say whether it is the drama, the pictures or the hidden meaning which holds us. This bit of allegory takes the place of Malory's story of the Seven Deadly Sins which Tennyson has discarded. Surely in doing so he has replaced a sermon with art.

What shall be said of these set pieces of symbolism? For one thing, they are quantitatively so small a part of the whole

1 GL, ll.209-226.
2 HG, ll.232-243.
3 GL, ll.883-1126.
4 HG, ll.379-444.

poem that they are negligible. On the other hand,they are not only interesting in themselves as narrative and pictures,but they are in keeping with the medieval tone of the legends. The presentation almost requires something of the kind.

Not so with certain main features of the story which also belong to the class of symbolism of design. Arthur represents the Soul. "By the Round Table I mean the world,"said Tennyson, "by Camelot the Church." If he went so far in the Spenserian manner,his annotaters may be warranted in making further deductions:Merlin is Intellect,the Grail typifies the highest spiritual attainment,the Siege Perilous,temptation,Guinevere and Lancelot,the heart,Vivien,Gawain,and Etarre,Sense. Here the reader rebels. He prefers to think of Arthur as a king,and Camelot as the "dim rich city." Nor does he wish to think of the knights as personified abstractions. The conception of the knightly ideal as a union of the best in man and the best in woman,the union of the Christian ideal with what was best in chivalry is one of the noblest and artistically the most beautiful conceptions the world has ever evolved. And so we want to think of the Round Table as a company of the loving and the daring pledged with Arthur to cleanse the world,living their lives in a background of the forests and castles of romance. Whereas the mind takes a certain pleasure in carrying out the allegory of the gate and that of Arthur's palace,here the parallel is exasperating. But after all we do not have to carry the impedimenta of these hidden meanings if we do not choose. The narrative and setting have their own charm. Nor would we fail to apply the inescapable meaning. But while we rest comfortably in this view,we cannot

forget that to employ in the nineteenth century such archaic and facile devices was unworthy of Tennyson.

Another type of allegory used by Tennyson is the parable or narrative which contains a hidden teaching. This kind of allegory is acceptable to the modern reader because it has a greater degree of reality, and the meaning comes with a pungency that gives pleasure. Such is Gareth's parable of the boy whose mother restrained him from climbing the eagle's nest:

> and so the boy
> Sweet mother neither clomb nor brake his neck,
> But brake his very heart in pining for it,
> And past away.[1]

This is at once amusing and effective. Better still is his parable of the kitchen-knave and his dog.[2] But Gareth who seems to be given to using parables as argument can be tedious, as in the anecdote of the two brides, Fame and Shame.[3] Merlin, too is exceedingly dull in the parable introducing his homily on Fame and Use.[4] One of the best examples of this type of allegory comes from the lips of Dagonet who pictures the twelve small maidens representing Innocence and who sat by the fountain on the day of the last tournament offering cups of wine:

> and thereupon I drank,
> Spat--pish--the cup was gold, the draught was mud.[5]

In this brief allegory Tennyson has compressed all the despair and bitterness which comes with noble causes lost. Even more

1 GL, ll.55-58.
2 GL, ll.983-986.
3 GL, ll.100-104.
4 MV, ll.486-511.
5 LT, ll.286-288.

successful for its power to suggest vistas of meaning is a parable of Merlin to which no paraphrase could do justice:

> Far other was the song that once I,heard
> By this huge oak,sung nearly where we sit;
> For here we met,some ten or twelve of us,to
> To chase a creature that was current then
> In these wild woods,the hart with golden horns.
> It was the time when first the question rose
> About the founding of a Table Round,
> That was to be for love of God and men
> And noble deeds,the flower of all the world;
> And each incited each to noble deeds.
> And while we waited,one,the youngest of us,
> We could not keep him silent,out he flashed,and
> Into such a song,such fire for fame
> Such trumpet blowings in it,coming down
> To such a stern and iron-clashing close
> That when he stopped,we longed to hurl together
> And should have done it,but the beauteous beast
> Scared by the noise upstarted at our feet
> And like a silver shadow slipped away
> Thro' the dim land. And all day long we rode
> Thro' the dim land against a rushing wind,
> That glorious roundel echoing in our ears,
> And chased the flashes of his golden horns
> Until they vanished by the fairy well
> . . . . . .
> and there
> We lost him--such a noble song was that.[1]

On the whole the case for the use of parable is strong. As a literary type it has a dy namic quality as distinguished from those forms where the symbolism is more direct. Its use in present day literature and journalism indicates that it has had vigor enough to survive. Tennyson usually employs it with artistic effectiveness.

Medieval in tone is the dream-vision form of allegory, which Tennyson uses with considerable frequency in the Idylls. Reading these passages we recall The Pearl and The Romance of the

1 MV,ll.403- 430.

Rose. Sometimes Tennyson employs the form for simple prophecy as in the dream of Leodogran. In doubt whether Arthur has a right to the throne,he sees in vision a slope of land hidden in the mists and on a height a phantom king. Warring figures on the slope suddenly vanish as the mists clear and Arthur the King "stood out in heaven crowned."[1]Paraphrase cannot do justice to the beauty of this poetry. Pensive and in keeping with her fallen fortunes is the dream-vision of Elaine:

> Then let her fancy flit across the past
> And roam the goodly places that she knew,
> And last bethought her how she used to watch
> Near that old home a pool of golden carp;
> And one was patched and blurred and lusterless
> Among his burnished brethren of the pool;
> And half asleep she made comparison
> Of that and these to her own faded self
> And the gay court and fell asleep again
> And dreamt herself was such a faded form
> Among her burnished sisters of the pool.[2]

A more poetic foreshadowing of Nemesis can scarcely be found than the dream of Guinevere:

> or if she slept she dreamed
> An awful dream,for then she seemed to stand
> On some vast plain before a setting sun,
> And from the sun there swiftly made at her
> A ghastly something and its shadow flew
> Before it till it touched her and she turned--
> When,lo! her own that broadening from her feet
> And blackening,swallowed the land,and in it
> Fair cities burnt...[3]

The truth that lies in retribution will bear elaboration. It will bear the elaboration of a five-act tragedy; and it may

1 CA,ll.427-441.
2 LE,ll.645-656.
3 G ,ll.74-83.

come upon us with equal power in five lines of allegory. Sinister in prophetic significance is the dream of Tristram:

> He seemed to pace the strand of Brittany
> Between Isolt of Britain and his bride,
> And showed them both the ruby chain, and both
> Began to struggle for it until his queen
> Grasped it so hard that all her hand was red.
> Then cried the Breton, "Look, her hand is red!
> These be no rubies, this is frozen blood
> And melts within her hand--her hand is hot
> With ill desires, but this I gave thee, look,
> Is all as cool and white as any flower.[1]

The sequel suggests with natural realism the confusing shifts of dreams and at the same time heightens the forecast of tragedy:

> Followed a rush of eagles wings, and then
> A whimpering of the spirit of the child
> Because the twain had spoiled her carcanet.

Even the most inveterate detractor of Tennyson must admit the power and beauty of these dream-visions. They are not only medieval in tone but suggest the medieval way of thinking which Tennyson made some effort to preserve in spite of his modern point of view.

In the kinds of allegory studied so far, Tennyson more or less definitely sets out to be allegorical. But there are other forms in which the inner meaning is far more subtle because it is more veiled, thus leaving more for the imagination and intellect of the reader. They stand out in contrast to the more obvious parallels such as the lions which Lancelot meets on the entrance to the Castle of the Grail[2] or the despair of Percival

1 LT, ll.406-419.
2 HG, l.813.

after entering upon the Quest, corresponding to Bunyan's Slough of Despond[1] or the Bunyan-like picture of the hypocritical ascetic, King Pellam.[2]

One of the more subtle forms of symbolism is found in short passages which plumb the depths of experience or bring to focus some tremendous aspect of the story. Stopford Brooke believes that allegory extends to the remotest by-ways of the legends. If it does so, it will be found in this compressed form. In the following list of such symbolic lines the thing indicated is followed by the passage which suggests it:

The brief period of purity among Arthur's knights:

> I beheld
> From eye to eye through all the order flash
> A momentary likeness of the King.[3]

The attack on asceticism:

> But while he stared about the shrine
> In which he scarce could see the Christ for saints.[4]

The insidious evil wrought by Vivien:

> A storm was coming, but the winds were still.[5]

The character of Vivien:

> But now the wholesome music of the wood
> Was dumbed by one from out the hall of Mark.[6]

The fate of Guinevere:

> the fair pearl necklace of the Queen
> That burst in dancing and the pearls were spilt;

1 HG, l.358-361.
2 BB, l.101-108.
3 CA, l.268-269
4 BB l.402-403.
5 MV, l.1.
6 BB, l.430

Some lost, some stolen, some as relics kept,
But nevermore the same two sister pearls
Ran down the silken thread to kiss each other
On her white neck.[1]

The failure of Guinevere:

then he sang
The twain together well might change the world.
But even in the middle of his song
He faltered and his hand fell from his harp.[2]

Tristram:

Thou makest broken music with thy bride,
. . . . . .
And so thou breakest Arthur's music, too.[3]

The failure of the Quest:

So fierce a gale made havoc here of late
Among the strange devices of our kings,
Yea, shook this newer, stronger hall of ours.[4]

Spiritual failure:

A broken chancel with a broken cross
That stood on a dark strait of a barren land.[5]

The list could be greatly extended. Few there be that achieve the Quest. Some of the incidents are of sadly ironic import. Tristram meets a lonely woman by a cross weeping for her lord. He repulses her with cynicism. Soon Isolt dies weeping by the cross of Tristram. The last tournament with its broken rules followed by coarse revelry is the tournament of the Dead Innocence. One of the most vivid passages in the whole series is of this ironic nature. Just as the knights have vowed to under-

1 MV, ll.449-455.
2 G , l.298-301.
3 LT, ll.264--268.
4 HG, ll.726-728.
5 PA, ll.177-178.

take the Quest, Arthur who has been quelling the heathen in the North returns:

> And in he rode and up I glanced and saw
> The golden dragon sparkling over all;
> And many of those who burned the hold, their arms
> Hacked and their foreheads grimed with smoke and seared
> Followed, and in among bright faces, ours,
> Full of the vision, prest.[1]

If he had written a treatise, Tennyson could not have more tellingly condemned mysticism as against the social ideal.

Still more in the veiled manner which modern art demands is a mode of allegory seen in the larger aspects of the work. We have Tennyson's statement[2] that he used the seasons as symbolic of the spiritual stages in the life of man. Such is the pathos of life that in spite of hope and valiant endeavor, the emotional and too often the actual life declines from youth to age. Too often in middle life comes

> the hardening of the heart
> Which brings irreverence for the dreams of youth.

Poetically this decline fits into a story of pathos, defeat, or tragedy. Tennyson found it so in the Idylls of the King. The enthusiasm of the knights, their full accord with the dreams of Arthur for cleansing the world are typified by spring. It is May when Lancelot brings Guinevere home, and the spirit of May is in the lusty, martial chant of the knights at her wedding with Arthur. It is springtime when youthful Gareth sets out joyously on his adventures. Weather effects of heat, sunshine, and dust with full flowing rivers and mowers in the meadows give the touch of mid-

1 HG, ll.262-268.
2 Memoir, Vol.II, p.133

summer in other Idylls. The last tournament occurs in autumn in a dripping rain. A white winter mist is folded "in all the passes of the world," when Arthur fights the last weird battle in the west.

If the atmosphere of the poems is thus achieved through the spiritual kinship between the seasons and events,it is maintained and varied by the lyrics sung by persons in the story which symbolically parallel events,moods,or characters. These songs have something of the effect of the Greek chorus. They are sweet echoes of what has passed,or they presage joy,pathos,remorse or cynicism. The mystic framework as occasioned by the unknown birth and death of Arthur is set before us in the Celtic triplets of Merlin. The joy of morning and springtime and knightly youth departing on great adventures are felt in Lynette's song:

> O Morning-Star that smilest in the blue[1]

and in

> Blow,trumpet,for the world is white with May.[2]

Other lyrics are symbolic of character. The pagan spirit of Vivien is revealed in her song in praise of sun-worship. Her seductive quality appears in

> Trust me not at all or all in all.[3]

Tristram declares his philosophy in

> Free love,free field--we love but while we may.[4]

and his sad acceptance of his tangled life in

> Ay,ay,O ay--a star was my desire,
> And one was far apart and one was near[5]

1 GL,.974.
2 CA,l.481
3 MV,l.396
4 LT,l.275.
5 LT,l.727.

These lyrics form a part of the emotional and imaginative element in the poem,and there would be no need of discussing them in reference to the didacticism of Tennyson were they not a part of the allegorical machinery and were it not for one other thing: by this means Tennyson has conveyed a considerable volume of thought. Anyone who doubts it should examine the thought content of the apparently simple song of Enid,"Turn Fortune,turn thy wheel." As for the others, we have the philosophy of free love,the pagan view of the senses,the mystery of birth and death.

One other form of allegory,the most artistic of all and that which interferes least with the narrative is implicit in the plot. The events of the story shadow forth the conflict between Sense and Soul. Arthur,the ideal king institutes an order of knights who shall be pure and brave and who shall labor with him to cleanse the world. He comes to defeat through the failure of these knights to overcome the base in human nature. And the enjoyment of the poem by the mature reader is in proportion as he grasps the inner significance of the events. He sees the knights as pilgrims seeking sometimes joyously,sometimes painfully,and many times falling away,the Celestial City. Behind the deeds of the knights he sees obscurely the inception of evil,its contagion and the final twilight of the gods,relieved by the gleam of a new year and a new order. The allegory here is no more didactic than Goethe's presentation of the inner meaning of Faust or the teaching of Shakespeare's tragedies that whatever happens, unless a man permits it,nothing can violate the soul. Every great piece of literature is allegorical in this sense. It is teaching in the way of art.

Summing up the studynof Tennyson's use of allegory we may say that his failure lies in a somewhat mechanical adjustment of character and other features of the legends to abstractions, and in the occasional introduction of a dull parable. Aside from these failures the poet has used the form with consummate art.

There are critics who make much of the allegory and trace out ingeniously incidents great and small, assigning meanings which Tennyson might have had in mind.[1] Tennyson, himself, made an illuminating comment on such activity:

In later years he often said, "They have taken my hobby and ridden it too hard, and have explained some things too allegorically, although there is an allegorical or perhaps a parabolic drift in

1 An example of this ingenious interpretation of an allegorical passage is the following from Elsdale's Studies in the Idylls of the King. It seeks to explain lines 254-274 of Gareth and Lynette: "The fairy king and fairy queens who come from a sacred mountain, cleft toward the sunrise, that is, Parnassus, to build the city are the old mythologies whose birthplace was in the East, the land of the rising sun. From them, besides the religions of the ancient world, are derived poetry, architecture, sculpture; all those refining arts and sciences which were called into existence mainly and primarily as the expression and embodiment of religious feeling. These with all that whole circle of unnumbered influences, mental, moral, or religious, derived from the experiences of the past with which they are associated, constitute the city in which the soul dwells--the sphere in which it works and the surrounding atmosphere in which it breathes...The city is built to music; for as harmony and proportion of sound constitute music, so harmony and proportion of all the various powers and elements which go to make up the man, will constitute a fitting shrine for the soul. 'Therefore never built at all;' for the process of assimilating and working up into one harmonious whole, all the various external elements, is continually going on, and unending. 'Therefore built forever;' for since harmonious and proportionate development is the continual law, the city will always be complete and at unity with itself." p.24.

The passage is difficult. But how did Elsdale know that Tennyson had all this in mind? Tennyson was deep sometimes, but his mind was simple rather than ingenious and intricate. Littledale considers the passage to be some of Merlin's mocking and riddling. op.cit., p.88.

the poems...Of course Camelot,for instance,a city of shadowy palaces is everywhere symbolic of the gradual growth of human beliefs and human institutions and of the spiritual development of man. Yet there is no single fact or incident,however seemingly mystical,which cannot be explained as without any mystery or allegory whatever".. On being asked if the Three Queens did not represent Faith,Hope,and Charity,he answered, "They mean that and they do not. They are three of the noblest of women. They are also those three Graces,but they are much more. I hate to say 'This means that,'because the thought within the image is much more than any one interpretation." [1]

After saying that poetry is like shot-silk and has many glancing colors and that every reader must make his own interpretation of the Idylls,he continued:

The whole is the dream of man coming into practical life and ruined by one sin. Birth is a mystery and death is a mystery and in the midst lies the tableland of life and its struggles and performances. It is not the history of one man nor of one generation,but of a whole cycle of generations.[2]

1 Memoir,Vol.II,pp.126-127
2 Ibid.,pp.127-128.

IV

With this word from the author we leave the allegory and come to the problem of direct moralizing. Do we find in these poems an obtrusion of moral teaching and if so, how much? After reading the four Idylls which appeared in 1859 as Enid, Vivien, Elaine, and Guinevere, the reader is surprised to note the increase in the intellectual quality in the volume of 1872 containing the new Idylls, The Coming of Arthur, The Holy Grail, Pelleas and Etarre with new titles, additions, and revisions of those that had appeared previously. The decision, probably revived somewhere about 1869when he was working on the Holy Grail, to give a moral import to the whole series motivated the new Idylls and necessitated a revision of the first series. Balin and Balan is instructive for, being the last of the series which Tennyson wrote, it shows him at work on problems of structure growing out of the plan of inserting a theme. This romance also is rather heavy in thought-content. Merlin and Vivien represent the intellectual characters, and the revision shows that Tennyson makes them act true to formula. The first impression of the new volume is that they are replete with maxim and homily. Even the youthful Gareth seems to have a store of proverbial wisdom. Those who enjoy the series for the story and the background of romance will be surprised at the quantity of this material which a close examination reveals. It will be best to quote here somewhat fully:

Accursed who from wrongs his father did
Would shape himself aright.[1]
Arthur.

Accursed who strikes nor lets the hand be seen.[2]
Arthur.

Love should have some rest and pleasure in himself.[3]
Merlin.

For men at most differ as heaven and earth
But women, worst and best, as Heaven and Hell.[4]
Merlin.

A doubtful throne is ice on summer seas.[5]
Leodogran.

Who should be king save him who makes us free?[6]
Gareth.

Red berries charm the bird.[7]
Bellicent.

The thrall in person may be free in soul.[8]
Gareth.

Who walks through fire will hardly heed the smoke.[9]
Gareth.

for worse than being fooled
Of others is to fool thyself.[10]
Gareth.

Woods have tongues and walls have ears.[11]
Vivien.

Here are snakes within the grass.[12]
Mark.

[1] GL,1.339.
[2] GL,1.427.
[3] MV,1.483.
[4] MV,1.812.
[5] CA,1.227.
[6] GL,1.136.
[7] PA,1.84.
[8] GL,1.162.
[9] GL,1.141.
[10] GL,1.1242.
[11] MV,1.522.
[12] MV,1.33.

That old true filth and bottom of the well
Where truth is hidden.[1]
Vivien.

Who are wise in love, love most, say least.[2]
Merlin.

Man dreams of fame while woman wakes to love.[3]
Vivien.

What shame in love, so love be true?[4]
Vivien.

Obedience is the courtesy due to kings.[5]
Arthur.

Authority forgets a dying king.[6]
Arthur.

Let never maiden think, however fair
She is not fairer in new weeds than old.[7]
Enid's mother.

As love, if love be perfect casts out fear.[8]
Vivien.

Seethed like the kid in its own mother's milk.[9]
Vivien.

Silence is wisdom.[10]
Vivien.

The Idylls which are comparatively free from this proverbial wisdom as Lancelot and Elaine, The Marriage of Geraint and Geraint and Enid show a clear gain in narrative movement and story interest.

Why has Tennyson introduced these maxims? It is of course well known that people in the folk-lore stage accumulate wise sayings. The Greeks and Romans enjoyed these apothegms even

[1] MV, l.478.
[2] MV, l.245.
[3] MV, l.458.
[4] MV, l.858.
[5] LE, l.713.
[6] PA, l.289.
[7] MG, l.721.
[8] MV, l.48[illegible].
[9] MV, l.865.
[10] MV, l.251.

when their literature was mature and their poets had their commonplace books from which they culled them. But the wisdom was in keeping with the time. But the scene and time here represent not the sixth century when Arthur actually lived but the chivalry of the Plantaganet period. If the poet wished by these maxims to give the original background, he seems to have perpetrated an anachronism. Edna St. Vincent Millay uses such material for local color but her proverbs are in keeping with the period she is describing.[1] Tennyson's belong to the dull strata of bourgeois life in Victorian England. There is no warrant for the device in Malory, in the Mabinogion, in Chretien deTroyes, in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. Besides marring the narrative interest they dull the treatment of character. Gareth, for instance, is overloaded with reflection for the joyous youth he is. Witness his opening speech.

Short reflective passages which are not distinctly proverbial occur not infrequently in the later poems. The following is typical:

> He scarce is knight, yea but half man, nor meet
> To fight for gentle damsel, he who lets
> His heart be stirred with any foolish heat
> At any gentle damsel's waywardness.[2]

Longer passages of moralizing or homily are put on the lips of Merlin and Arthur. Merlin can amplify his own proverbs with a dullness that makes the reader wish for one of the subtle intellections of Robinson. This kind of thing:

[1] In The King's Henchman.
[2] GL, I.1147.

Face-flatterer and backbiter are the same
And they, sweet soul, that most impute a crime
Are pronest to it and impute themselves
Wanting the mental range or low desire
Not to feel lowest makes them level all;
Yea, they would pare the mountains to the plain
To leave an equal baseness; and in this
Are harlots like the crowd, that if they find
Some stain or blemish in a name of note
Not grieving that their greatest are so small
Inflate themselves with some insane delight
And judge all nature from her feet of clay,
Without the will to lift their eyes and see
Her god-like head crowned with spiritual fire
And touching other worlds.[1]

Surely these ideas must have been well-worn even in Tennyson's day. Compare the following from Robinson's Merlin:

When I began with Arthur I could see
In each bewildered man who dots the earth
A moment with his days, a groping thought
Of an eternal will, strangely endowed
With merciful illusions whereby self
Becomes the will itself, and each man swells
In fond accordance with his agency.
Now Arthur, Modred, Lancelot and Gawaine
Are swollen thoughts of this eternal will
Which have no other way to find the way
That leads them on to their inheritance
Than by the time-infuriating flame
Of a wrecked empire, lighted by the torch
Of woman, who together with the light
That Galahad found, is yet to light the world.[2]

Robinson can, to be sure, be over-subtle and dull as well. But he will nearly always be dull in a new way. A list of homilies

[1] MV, l.822.
[2] Edwin Arthur Robinson, Collected Poems, New York, 1929, p.307.

from the Idylls of which the one quoted above is representative follows:

Arthur on the repentance of Edyrn,.....23 lines.[1]

Merlin on harlots,.....25 lines.[2]

Arthur on the Quest,.....30 lines.[3]

Merlin on Fame,.....30 lines.[4]

Arthur on the problem of evil,.....20 lines.[5]

Arthur on prayer,.....15 lines.[6]

Arthur to Guinevere,.....152 lines.[7]

In addition there are shorter passages. Tennyson is author of a passage, very dull, on the true and false. The little maid discourses winningly on marriage and the disadvantages of greatness.[8] The dialog between Merlin and Vivien, they both being intellectual, borders on casuistry. Arthur upbraids Guinevere in 104 lines, takes breath while the Queen crawls to his feet, and adds a peroration of 48 lines. Of this speech, Grierson says that it verges perilously on sublime self-complacency. Van Dyke finds it at once superb and intolerable. Certain aspects of it will be discussed in another connection. Suffice it to say here that the most cruel lines are

> Better the king's waste hearth and aching heart
> Than thou reseated in thy place of light,
> The mockery of my people and their bane.[9]

[1] GE,l.894.
[2] MV,l.810.
[3] HG,l.885.
[4] MV,l.486.
[5] PA,l.9.
[6] PA,l.408.
[7] G,l.419 and l.529.
[8] Works,p.436,ll.190-205.
[9] G,l.521.

The passage by Tennyson as author is on p.344,ll.1-7

The most superficial line is:

> Well is it that no child is born of thee.[1]

The most complacent line is:

> Lo, I forgive thee as eternal God forgives.[2]

The most inartistic passage is that where, the poet forgetting the passion and drama of the moment allows Arthur to break into the general reflection beginning:

> for indeed I know
> Of no more subtle master under heaven.[3]

It is clear in all this that Tennyson sees nothing amiss. He approves of Arthur. If the reader enjoys the passage--and many do-- and if there be any justification for the adjectives sublime and superb, it lies in the style and in the situation, the drama of grief in both hearts and broken lives; and in such lines as

> Let no man dream but that I love thee still.[4]

Of the long passages of moralizing listed one should be excepted, as being imaginative and charged with feeling, the despairing cry of Arthur beginning, "I found him in the shining stars."[5]

[1] G,l.421.
[2] G,l.541.
[3] G,l.474.
[4] G,l.557.
[5] PA,l.9.

In contrast to the platitudes a number of weighty ideas are set forth in the poems; the mystic ideal, the ascetic ideal, Epicureanism, free love, the modern conception of kingship, philosophical justification for evil. In dealing with a good-sized idea Tennyson is usually neither sentimental nor dull. The speech of Arthur just referred to is an illustration of the "powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life." The paganism of Vivien and the cynicism of Tristram are set forth in action and song. The dialog between Dagonet and Tristram is on a distinctly intellectual plane but has a Shakespearean ring. Nor can we say that such a heavy load of philosophical thought is misplaced in a romance-sequence because the mind of the reader is adjusted for adventure and cannot readily jump to philosophy. The reader's mind is scarcely set for romance. Tennyson pitched the key on a deeper note from the beginning. King Lear was a more legendary figure than King Arthur, but we do not find fault with Shakespeare for placing on his lips the profoundest meditations on the problems of life.

V

But in spite of these successes we must admit that the Idylls do carry a heavy load of raw thought in the form of maxim, platitude, and homily. Quantitatively, there is a great deal of it. Qualitatively, it is pretty bad. Another charge against the poems is that Tennyson has used the delightful old legends as a vehicle for Victorian conceptions

of conduct,and by this is meant false ideas of life due to sentimentality and prudishness. There will be sins of commission and sins of omission. A false conception of woman certainly was current in the reign of Victoria. There was a sentimentality, a putting woman on a pedestal. It was the day when it was a great thing for a man to say, "All that I am I owe to my angel mother." This is not a masculine way of looking at life. Tennyson shared this view that woman lives on a spiritual height from which she shines down with a purifying and restraining influence on the rough world of men. Consequently he could not conceive a great complex of evil and good like Shakespeare's Cleopatra. He does not go into the hearts of Guinevere and Isolt. His women are,when they are fully drawn,either sweet,lovely creatures like Elaine or Enid,or wholly evil like Vivien and Etarre. There was consequently an over-emphasis on marriage and wifehood. Arthur believes that he cannot quell the heathen without a good wife. When all his hopes and dreams come to naught,he places the blame upon Guinevere.[1] Guinevere is convinced that he is right and takes the blame.[2]

1 Works,G,l.450.
2 Ibid.,ll.648-650.

Even Tristram ascribes the downfall of the realm as due "mainly to the sullying of our Queen."[1] There is some truth, of course in all this, but over-emphasis of it does not give a virile attitude toward life. It is sentimental and false, because half-true.

As a result of this view of woman chastity was the great virtue. The eighteenth century did not over-emphasize this virtue, nor does the twentieth except in backwater regions where immorality means only one thing--lack of chastity. In the Idylls the whole plot hinges on chastity. We do not say he could have avoided this wholly. It was in the story of his source, and there is no better theme for great literature than illicit love. But Tennyson gives scarcely a line to the treason of Modred, and the breaking of the laws of friendship by Lancelot, because he is pre-occupied with the sin of Guinevere. Arthur thus arraigns her:

> The children born of thee are sword and fire,
> Red ruin, the breaking up of laws, the craft of
> Kindred and the godless hosts of heathen
> Swarming o'er the Northern sea.[2]

All this is heaped on the head of poor Guinevere. The barbarians in Denmark have heard of her sin too! For the last line must refer to invaders rather than to the heathen in the North. It is not only false but absurd. We long for the sanity of Robinson's Sir Lamorak:

[1] LT, l.677.
[2] G, l.422.

crowns and orders and high palaces
And all the manifold ingredients
Of this good solid kingdom where we sit
Will not go rolling down to Hell just yet
Because a pretty woman is a fool.[1]

Then, too, Tennyson's attitude toward Lancelot is objectionable. He barely recognizes his share in the sin and that in a passage which contains an extenuating quality:

and he
That did not shun to smite me in worse way
Had yet that grace of courtesy in him left
He spared to lift his hand against the king
Who made him knight.[2]

He has, besides, built up for Lancelot such a winning knightly personality and has developed his misgivings and remorse so carefully as to half condone his sin. Even Lancelot himself reproaches Guinevere in one of the most intolerable scenes to be found anywhere in literature: It must be given in full: Lancelot meets the Queen in a flowery walk, but passes without speaking. When she protests, he casts his eyes upon the ground. Then:

Last night methought I saw
That maiden saint who stands with lily in hand
In yonder shrine. All round her prest the dark.
And all the light upon her silver face
Flowed from the spiritual lily that she held.

Lo! these her emblems drew mine eyes-- away;
For see, how perfect-pure! As light a flush
As hardly tints the blossom of the quince
Would mar their charm of stainless maidenhood.

[1] E.A. Robinson, op.cit., p.245.
[2] G, l.431.

"Sweeter to me," she said, "this garden rose
Deep hued and many folded! Sweeter still
The wildwood hyacinth and the bloom of May!
Prince, we have ridden among the flowers
In those fair days--not all as cool as these,
Though season earlier. Art thou sad? or sick?
. . . . . .
Sick? Or for any matter angered at me?

Then Lancelot lifted his large eyes; they dwelt
Deep-tranced on hers and could not fall.
Her hue changed at his gaze; so turning side by side
They passed.[1]

In one other respect Tennyson shows that he shares the Victorian slant of thought. He makes the spiritual mating of two souls united by a deep love secondary to the legal bond of a loveless marriage. The circumstance of the love between Guinevere and Lancelot is fully given; their meeting, their involuntary love, and Guinevere's feeling toward Arthur-- which the reader shares. These things are not wholly within the control of the human will. This is not a brief for free love. But Tennyson with his eyes on his readers and not on his theme will not face the fact that such devastating tangles do exist in this world.

There are a few instances of Victorian reticence. Tennyson is justified in rejecting the incest story concerning the birth of Modred. This would not fit into his design. But he goes out of his way to cover the matter up in "no kin of mine." One notices his report of the birth of Arthur. Malory uses no varnish.[2] More amusing is his care for modern proprieties in having Elaine visit Lancelot

[1]BB,l.255.
[2]Malory,op.cit.,Bk.I,Chap.II. Tennyson,CA,l.203.

by day in the hermit's cave to care for him; but she must go each night to a kinsman's in the city. To make this plausible, he first invents the kinsman and mentions that Elaine's brother Torre stays there instead of at the court.[1] When an author maneuvers so hard to preserve the proprieties, it reveals an unusual squeamishness in such matters or unusual care for the morals of young readers.

VI

So much for the obtrusion of morality and Victorian scruples. But the poet falls short of perfect artistry in one other point--consistency. And this is due in large measure to Tennyson's desire that the complete series should contain a message. The introduction of a theme into a series of poems composed at intervals during twenty-five years must have occasioned great care on the part of a good literary craftsman like Tennyson. The difficulty would be augmented by the fact that he did not write the romances in chronological sequence. In preparing the volume of 1872 containing new Idylls motivated by a central idea, he found it necessary to revise these previously written in accordance with this idea. In spite of his skill, the result is not wholly successful. In some particulars there is a lack of consistency in treatment. Tennyson was not always sure what he wanted to do. There is an unsteadiness, a want of firm handling. In other words, he does not

[1]LE,1.840.

have complete control of his material. He wants the detachment necessary to lean hard on his subject.

The first confusion has reference to the theme. In the epilogue To the Queen which was first published in 1872 he stated this theme as

> shadowing Sense at war with Soul,
> Ideal manhood enclosed in real man.[1]

We note at the start that these two are not exactly the same thing. Evidently, like Spenser, Tennyson intends to "fashion a gentleman in vertuous and gentle discipline." However, if the ideal man serves as a foil to the characters who fall into sensuality, there will be no inconsistency. But this theme as stated by the author relates to individual conduct. And yet after reading the whole series, the reader has the feeling that the real theme is the social ideal of building a righteous and enlightened civilization. Much is said about cleansing the world and making a realm. Arthur "brake the petty kings and fought with Rome and thrust the heathen from the Roman Wall." Here are represented three foes of civilization, savagery, foreign oppression, and internal conflict. Arthur says his knights are to serve as model "for the mighty world and be the fair beginning of a time." With the other characters this social ideal seems to be paramount. Gareth longs to "sweep down on all things base

[1] To the Queen, ll.37-38.

and dash them dead," thus working with Arthur to cleanse the world. Guinevere cries in her repenting, "Ah, God what might I not have made of thy fair world, had I but loved thy highest creature here?" Isolt declares that through the vows of the knights, the king prevailed over his enemies "and made the realm." Tristram says of the vows:

> They served their use, their time; for every knight
> Believed himself a greater than himself,
> And every follower eyed him as a God;
> Till he, being lifted up beyond himself,
> Did mightier deeds than elsewhere he had done,
> And so the realm was made.[1]

Not only in words but in deeds does the social ideal receive emphasis. Arthur fights the twelve great battles, he goes here and there dispersing outlaws and quelling the heathen, he sits as a righteous judge. His great distress after his last battle is that his realm "reels back into the beast."

But the crowning emphasis of social righteousness over individual is Arthur's condemnation of the Quest. By so doing he puts the stamp of disapproval on the search for spiritual perfection. The teaching is dubious. The implication seems to be that the quest for the highest spiritual attainment is incompatible with activity for human welfare:

> the King must guard
> That which he rules and is as the hind
> To whom a space of land is given to plow,
> Who may not wander from the allotted field
> Before his work be done, but being done,
> Let visions of the night or of the day
> Come as they will.[2]

1 Works, p.432, ,ll.675-680.
2 Ibid., p.413, ll.901-907.

But Galahad's experience is in direct contradiction to this. In the strength of the vision he rode

> Shattering all evil customs everywhere,
> And passed through pagan realms and made them mine,
> And clashed with pagan hordes and bore them down.[1]

Tennyson through Arthur seems to say that when we have finished righting human wrongs, we may cultivate the spiritual nature. Galahad reverses the order and finds spiritual attainment the means to righting human wrongs. There is enough here to indicate that Tennyson was not clear in his own mind as to the relation between these two aspects of progress. Nor was he clear as to which he wished to make primary in the poems.

To add to the confusion, his son states in the Memoir that his father considered the following lines as central:

> In moments when he feels he cannot die
> And knows himself no vision to himself,
> Nor the high God a vision, nor that One
> Who rose again.[2]

Now the hope of immortality and the reality of the unseen dominated Tennyson's thought during his later years; but will anyone say that these ideas are central in the Idylls of the King? Still another theme is iterated in the later Idylls. It is an idea that recurs frequently throughout Tennyson's poetry, the idea of universal law, of harmony. Music is the symbol of this harmony. The city of Camelot is built to music. Balin on returning to Arthur's court after his exile is enjoined to move "to music with thine Order and the King." When he wins approval, "All the world

[1] HG, ll.476-579.
[2] HG, ll.912-915.

made music, and he felt his being move in music." Dagonet tells Tristram that he "has made broken music"... "and so thou breakest Arthur's music, too." Of Arthur's constellation, Dagonet says:

> It makes a silent music up in heaven.
> And I and Arthur and the angels hear.[1]

Thus Tennyson thrusts into a great work certain favorite ideas whether they fit or not. Many poets do this, but they are often didactic when they do so.

Another example of unsteady treatment is in the character of Arthur. Not that Tennyson is in doubt about Arthur. He thoroughly approves of the character as he has drawn him. But sometimes a poet who is a thinker, lacks firmness in character portrayal because he does think. A pious streak in Tennyson makes him like his Arthur, but he sees so clearly the objections which can be made to him that he puts words of detraction on the lips of other characters. But he overdoes the matter, thus dividing the sympathy of the reader:

Vivien:

> This Arthur pure?
> Great nature through the flesh herself hath made
> Gives him the lie. There is no being pure
> My cherub.[2]

[1] LT, ll.349-350.
[2] MV, l.49.

The Red Knight:

Lo! art thou not that eunuch-hearted king
Who fain had clipped free manhood from the earth--
The woman-worshipper.[1]

Etarre:

I never heard his voice
But longed to break away.[2]

Guinevere:

she thought him cold,
High, self-contained, and passionless.[3]

A moral child without the craft to rule
Else had he not lost me.[4]

Arthurm, my lord, Arthur, the faultless king,
That passionless perfection, my good lord--
But who can gaze upon the sun in heaven?
He never spake word of reproach to me,
He never had a glimpse of mine untruth,
He cares not for me.
. . . . . .
Rapt in this fancy of the Table Round,
And swearing men to vows impossible,
To make them like himself.[5]

I though I could not breathe in that fine air,
That pure severity of perfect light.[6]

Tristram:

Man! Is he man at all, methought.
. . . . . .
he seemed to me no man
But Michael trampling Satan; so I swear,
Being amazed. But this went by. The vows?
O, ay, the wholesome madness of an hour--

a doubtful lord,
To bind them by inviolable vows
Which flesh and blood, perfotce would violate.[7]

1 LT, l.444.
2 PE, l.247.
3 G, l.402.
4 LE, l.146.
5 Le, l.121.
6 G, l.639.
7 LT, l.658.

Now these expressions chime in so pat with the reader's opinion that the effect is the opposite of what the author intended. Arthur's last words to Guinevere complete the reader's disapproval. Tennyson is unsteady in his treatment of him here from what might be called spiritual obtuseness. If a genuine poet be spiritually obtuse in some outlying province of his mind, he might while operating in that realm, perpetrate such a speech and be unaware of the enormity of the performance. It would not be wholly bad. There would be winter mists, convent walls, horses neighing in the courtyard, and a queen in the dust. There would be feeling and echoes of music--something which would make it possible to condemn the speech and at the same time apply to it the adjectives sublime and superb. But it would defeat the author's purpose.

There is still another illustration of vacillation on the the part of Tennyson. The love between Lancelot and Guinevere is treated in the main with consistency. Of course it had to be illicit love in order to secure the tragic close. But there was some vacillating. Tennyson was not adapted to the theme of adultery. Certain passages point to a desire on his part to make this love Platonic:

The Cornish King had heard a wandering voice
Blown into shelter at Tantagil say
That out of naked, knight-like purity
Sir Lancelot worshipt no unmarried girl
But the great Queen, herself, fought in her name,
Sware by her--vows like theirs that high in heaven
Love most but neither marry nor are given
In marriage.
. . . . . .
And is the fair example followed sir,
In Arthur's household?

Ay by some few--ay truly, youths that hold
It more beseems the virgin knight
To worship woman as true wife beyond
All hopes of gaining, than as maiden girl.
So passionate for an utter purity
Beyond the limit of their bond are these.[1]

Outwardly, at least, their love is the woman-worship of the troubadours. Balin says, "The Queen we worship, Lancelot and I and all." Lancelot describes the construction which the court puts upon it:

But now my loyal worship is allowed
Of all men; many a bard without offence
Has linked our names together in his lay,
Lancelot, the flower of bravery, Guinevere the
The pearl of beauty; and our knights at feast
Have pledged us in this union, while the King
Would listen smiling.[2]

Besides these passages, Tennyson somehow colors the meetings and conversation of the two with the seeming of innocence. Vivien spies upon them:

Yet while they rode together down the plain
Their talk was all of training, terms of art.[3]

[1]MV,1.8.
[2]LE,1.110.
[3]MV,1.121.

Lancelot wears no maiden's favor in the lists. There is an iteration of the phrase, "Love-loyal to the least wish of the Queen."[1] She is his one love. His feeling for her is always reverent. He makes a claim that one does not usually associate with illicit love:

> Our bond as not the bond of man and wife
> Should have in it an absoluter trust
> To make up that defect.[2]

The speech in which he presents to her the diamonds is the speech of a Platonic rather than an adulterous lover:

> Lady, my liege, in whom I have my joy,
> Take what I had not won except for thee,
> These jewels and make me happy, making them
> An armlet for the roundest arm on earth
> Or necklace for a neck to which the swan's
> Is tawnier than her cygnet's; these are words;
> Your beauty is your beauty, and I sin
> In speaking, yet, O grant my worship of it
> Words as we grant grief tears.[3]

In Becket Tennyson alters the story to make Rosamond believe that she is the wedded wife of Henry. In the interest of propriety and morality he shied away from the fact of adulterous

[1] G,l.125.
[2] LE,l.1184.
[3] LE,l.1173. Malory also is not always consistent in this matter. While he puts the stamp of disapproval upon the love of Lancelot, he tells how Lancelot chided Tristram for not being true to Isolt of Ireland because of his marriage to Isolt of Brittany. "And in the meantime, there was a knight in Brittany...and he came to the Court of King Arthur, and there he met with Sir Lancelot du Lake and told him of the marriage of Sir Tristram. Then said Sir Lancelot: Fie upon him, untrue knight to his lady, that so noble a knight as Sir Tristram is should be found to his first lady false." The attitude of Guinevere in this case also is that of the days of courtly love. Malory,op.cit.,Bk.VIII,chaps. 36 and 37.

love. And there is some swerving in the case of Lancelot. Unconsciously tinged with the double standard of the Victorian Age which placed the burden of sin upon the woman, Tennyson has been as lenient to Lancelot as he has been hard upon Guinevere. "And all through thee!" is the "blameless King's" condemnation of the Queen.

VII

It is difficult to disentangle this lack of uniformity in dealing with certain phases of his subject from the sacrifice of beauty. In the interest of his theme Tennyson degrades the characters of Gawain and Tristram. This is not a flaw, but a distinct gain; for he needs more variety in his persons than Malory provides. In the new roles the two characters fit into the structure of the plot admirably. Besides they are both well-drawn, Tristram, the cynic, being one of the best things Tennyson has done; and The Last Tournament is one of the best of the Idylls. But having degraded the character of Tristram, he has no right to the lovely ending of the old stories. And yet in the last page before the tragedy, the poet drifts into the sweet lyricism of a deathless love.

Another sacrifice of beauty has to do with the Quest. It is difficult to see how Tennyson could have done other than he has done in making the Quest a failure. That belonged to the story. And he greatly lifted the tone by giving Arthur a higher motive than Malory for condemning the Quest. Whereas Malory makes Arthur lament because he

will miss the goodly fellowship of his knights, Tennyson skillfully fits this failure into his theme of social righteousness.

> Your places being vacant at my side
> This chance of noble deeds will come and go
> Unchallenged while ye follow wandering fires.[1]

But artistically the Quest should not have failed. To achieve it was the very flowering of Christian knighthood. And Tennyson has lavished on this part of the legend the wealth of his imagination; the nun and her vision, the year of miracle, the great scene in the hall when Galahad sits in the siege Perilous, the departure of the knights,-- worthy of Abbey's painting-- the narratives of the seeking of the Grail by Percival, Sir Bors, Lancelot, and the achievement of the Quest by Galahad are told with the highest degree of dramatic suspense, accompanied by beauty and magnificence of image, by pathos and intimations of spiritual rapture. Only one detail of the return is in keeping with these narratives, and that is the tempest which shatters the emblems of kings in Camelot. For the rest, there is the light mockery of Gawain and Arthur's harangue of condemnation. The anticlimax here is very great. If the Quest must fail, the least a poet could do would be to reconcile the reader by purging the heart through pity after the manner of great tragedy. But what do we have? Arthur like

[1]HG,1.317.

a schoolmaster calls the roll of his knights who report their adventures. If he cannot disapprove, he says nothing. To Lancelot who really saw the Grail, though veiled, he makes no reply. The answer of good, blunt, Sir Bors who with Galahad achieved the Quest is one of the most affecting in the poem;

> "Ask me not, for I may not speak of it;
> I saw it;" and the tears were in his eyes.[1]

But Arthur is silent. Upon the light words of Gawain, Arthur is in his element. He can rail. Then he turns to Lancelot like an "endless clergyman" and lectures him. Incapable of understanding "the one sin" and the knight's torn heart, he offers as solution a neat copy-book maxim after the manner of Polonius. Then after slighting words concerning the achievements of Percival and Galahad, he closes with characteristic complacence by intimating that he has his visions too, but at the proper time. Could anything be worse? And Tennyson was apparently unaware of the lack of fitness in making the heathen whom Sir Bors meets use the very words of Arthur in mocking the Quest. How could a poet who was an artist to his fingertips perpetrate so banal an anti-climax? It must be that he lacked in this case the artist's detachment. In Victorian fashion he was so determined to preach the gospel of doing good that he forgot the artistic requirements of his poem.

1

VIII

Tennyson's didacticism , then, in the Idylls of the King has been considered with references to five points: The allegory, Victorian ideals, inconsistency of treatment, the obtrusion of moral teaching, and the sacrifice of beauty.

1. A close examination of the allegory leads to the conclusion that with a few exceptions, the allegory is either negligible, or it has been used with great art. The exceptions are two allegories in the form of parable, and in the somewhat artificial and archaic adjustment of characters and institutions to abstractions. These failures are overbalanced by the successful use of allegory in parable, dream-vision, lyric, and in the allegorical significance of the four seasons. Better still is the subtle working out of the theme through character and event and the detailed use of allegory in short passages.

2. The poem has been made the vehicle of certain Victorian ideas which according to our standards are either sentimental, false, or half-true. His attitude toward woman is sentimental; he emphasizes the vice of unchastity unduly as compared with the emphasis on treason and disloyalty; he is touched with the double standard which places the chief burden of the sin upon Guinevere; he is sometimes guilty of amusing or unjustifiable reticence.

3. The poem is sometimes lacking in consistency and sureness of treatment. He states one theme in the epilogue,

but emphasizes another in the poem. Later Idylls emphasize a third idea. In the Memoir he mentions a fourth idea as central. Unsteadiness in the portrayal of Arthur helps to defeat his purpose. He vacillates to some extent between adulterous and Platonic love in the case of Lancelot and Guinevere.

4. There has been considerable obtrusion of moral teaching in the form of maxim, homily, and platitude. The extent of this is sufficient to mar the poem. Not only this but the intellectual content is sometimes didactic because misplaced as on the lips of youthful Gareth or as making heavy, important figures like Merlin and Arthur.

5. There has been some sacrifice of beauty relating to the failure of the Quest for the Holy Grail. This sacrifice was not inescapable but arose from Tennyson's desire to make the poem teach the value of the social ideal as against extreme individualism. The anticlimax produced by Arthur's denunciation of the Quest is all the greater because of the magnificent poetry which describes the Quest.

It should be said that another chapter could be written to show Tennyson's inspired selection and invention in vitalizing the old legends. Still another chapter could be written to show that in spite of his didacticism, and in spite of the excellent qualities of other renderings Tennyson's treatment of the Arthurian story is the best in English literature.[1]

IX

After he was sixty-five, like his own Ulysses, Tennyson set out upon a new adventure in the attempt to use a new form, drama, and a new subject-matter, English history. It is true that a dramatic vein had already manifested itself in the various monologues. As to English history he had done very little, The Charge of the Light Brigade appearing in 1854, and the metrical experiment, Boadicea, in 1859. In the decade of the eighties he wrote

[1]It is interesting to note that Tennyson's successors among the English poets have modernized their sources. Nothing could be more alien to the spirit of Malory, to say nothing of the old romances than Arnold's Tristram and Iseult, especially the concluding picture of Iseult of Brittany. Swinburne has made his Tristram of Lyonesse a lyric in the narrative structure glorifying passionate love. The Guinevere and Lancelot of Morris are modern in feeling. He is more medieval in Galahad, A Christmas Mystery. Robinson's studies are the most sophisticated of all. His opening scene between Isolt and her father suggests the sweet-girl-and-fond-daddy scenes of the films. Sir Lamorak and other knights gossip about court affairs like modern men in the club car of a Pullman--with perhaps more casuistry.

good war poetry, The Defence of Lucknow, The Charge of the Heavy Brigade, and the unrivalled ballad, The Revenge.

In the meantime, he turned his attention in the eighteen-seventies to drama with the idea of continuing "the line of Shakespeare's English Chronicle-plays which end with the commencement of the Reformation."[1] In this decade he produced Harold, Becket, and Queen Mary, the three forming what he called a historical trilogy presenting dramatically "the making of England." In The Foresters he sketched the "state of the people in another great transition period of the making of England, when the barons sided with the people and eventually won for them the Magna Charta."[2] "He believed," records his son, "in the future of our modern English stage when education should have made the masses more literary." "He regarded the drama as one of the most humanizing of influences. He always hoped that the State or the municipalities as well as the public schools would produce our great English historical plays so that they might form part of the Englishman's ordinary educational curriculum."[3]

In some such spirit he began the new enterprize. Now it is pretty safe to say that when Shakespeare wrote his Richards and Henrys he did not set out to instruct his audiences in the history of their country. Nor did Sir Walter Scott in his historical novels. If literature so

[1] Memoir, Vol.II, p.173.
[2] Ibid.,
[3] Ibid., Vol.II, p.174.

motivated may be good but not great, the reason is not far to seek. The author is not possessed by his theme. He has deliberately chosen the pedestrian rather than the inspired level. He may be accurate in detail and he may give a vivid picture of a historical period, but what Browning's Andrea del Sarto called the play, the insight and the stretch will be beyond him. But the assumption that Tennyson in this work was actuated by an educational aim must not be pressed too far. We cannot say precisely what was in the depth of his mind. It is probable that his motives were mixed. There was doubtless in addition the artist's need of the stimulus of a new form and a new field. "He felt he had the power." But it is fair to say that he was not wholly free in the artist's sense in his choice of theme. Consequently, the resulting work is not pure art. In the case of a man like Tennyson whose powers retained great vitality up to the last, the pity is that while he was writing this he could not be writing that. We shall never known what we have missed because the poet did not choose a field more congenial to his powers.

But the dramas are good plays to read. And aside from the secondary level which the choice of subject compelled him to take,[1] there is very little direct didacticism in them. He had all his life been a reader of dramatic literature and a playgoer. He took infinite pains with his trilogy, reading widely in the historical background, seeking

1 A secondary level for him.

and taking advice. He recognized the new field,his own limitations and had a grip on himself.

The first thing that strikes the observing reader is his restraint in two habits of writing,the use of ornament which had characterized all his writing up to this time,and the habit of moralizing which had been growing on him since the inception of The Princess. Tennyson seemed fully cognizant of the objective nature of the new medium and determined to avoid the ornate and rhetorical. In referring to The Cup and The Foresters,Mary Anderson wrote to Hallam Tennyson:

> Lord Tennyson showed by his remarks that he had the instincts of a true dramatist; and he moreover asked me to tell him of any lines that might seem to me to overweight the dramatic action of these plays. He thoroughly appreciated the need of action and was ready to sacrifice even his most beautiful lines for the sake of dramatic effect.[1]

A similar restraint is noticeable in the matter of ethical teaching. He has not,however,wholly escaped the latter fault. Proverbial wisdom is scattered freely throughout Harold and The Foresters. Tennysonian ideas appear but are seldom forced in. For example,the false oath of truth-loving Harold makes it legitimate to set forth a favorite idea, "The truth against the world." Marriage and parenthood receive a certain emphasis. The idea of an orderly,settled government seems natural on the lips of Harold and Elizabeth. The use of the term music as a symbol of law and order occurs once. The poet shows a Victorian squeamishness in changing the story of Rosamond so

1 Memoir,Vol.II,p.176

that she becomes the wife of Henry by a left-handed marriage.[1] Want of dramatic tact or undue care for the ethics of the situation must account for the following speech by William the Conqueror which mars the closing scene of Harold:

> Leave them. Let them be.
> Bury him and his paramour together.
> He that was false in oath to me it seems,
> Was false to his own wife. We will not give him
> Christian burial; yet he was a warrior,
> And wise, yea, truthful, till that blighted vow,
> Which God avenged today.[2]

But after all these flaws are comparatively few. We must go back to the utilitarian choice of subject to discover at least one of the main reasons why Tennyson's dramas fall short of the highest excellence. Because of this choice Tennyson had to deal with intractable material which he could not sufficiently fuse with imagination. Other reasons for the comparative failure lie outside our inquiry, namely continuing the Elizabethan type of drama in the nineteenth century, and want of mastery in dramatic technique as evinced in the length of the plays and long speeches.

But that type of criticism which disparaged Tennyson's dramas because it was foreordained that a great lyric poet could not write plays is happily past. "If he has not written great dramas, he has written three good ones" says

[1] Memoir, Vol. II, p. 195, Footnote. CF. Works, p. 688.
[2] Works, p. 658, ll. 81-87.

one interpreter.[1] William Archer says: "I will confess that--apart from Mr. Hardy's Dynasts a magnificent epic rather than a drama--Tennyson's Queen Mary seems to me of all the Elizabethanizing products that which has most of the breath of life in it."[2] And not the least of the credit lies in the fact that late in life he subjected himself to the discipline of restraint required by working in a new field.

[1] Thomas E. Rankin, English Literature, New York, 1917, p.318.
[2] William Archer, The Old Drama and the New, Boston, 1923.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

I

In spite of his aloofness and his determination to secure the solitude which the pursuit of poetry required, Tennyson at an early period evinced an alert interest in the problems of his day. His first period though mainly devoted to his art, showed that he was awake to questions of national life, religion, and philosophy. His intellectual growth between 1830 and 1835 was phenomenal. The leap from 1830 to 1832 was startling enough. Until all his poems can be dated, we can not make a thorough study of his development. But it is certain that the following poems were written before 1835: Ulysses, Morte D'Arthur, The Vision of Sin, the Two Voices, and The Supposed Confessions. By 1842 he had written some of the elegies to In Memoriam. That he had written one of the late ones by 1845 appears from a letter in which his sister, Cecilia, mentions his having put her wedding in a poem.[1] How many of those in between had he written? His dealing with contemporary thought and events in this first period was mainly successful. The artist in him dominated. After 1842 he was too much engrossed with his public. The first notable failure was The Princess, published in 1847.

[1] Memoir, Vol. I, p. 203

II

An editor of the Princess states that the surface-thought of England was at this time occupied with the Irish famine, corn laws, and free trade, and that it was not until many years later that the people of England awoke to the fact that something was wrong in the position of woman.[1] Nevertheless, such ideas had been in the air since Rousseau. The germ of the idea was a corallary of the Utilitarian philosophy. And there had been Mary Wollstoncraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman and Margaret Fuller's Woman in the Nineteenth Century. There had also been the Reform Bill of 1832 with its implications. The idea of Woman's Suffrage had been discussed by "The Apostles" at Trinity.[2] We cannot, therefore, credit Tennyson with originality in his choice of theme.

His judgment of the poem was sound. "My book is out," he said, "and I hate it."[3] In the conversational framework of the poem the poet is asked to dress up the stories artistically. He is pressed by the women to make it serious and by the men to give them something mock-heroic. Between them he

> moved as in a strange diagonal
> And maybe neither pleased myself nor them.[4]

The Princess is, however, not without its good points. The induction with its background and its conversational grace and banter is exquisite in this kind. The setting of the college

[1]Memoir, Vol.1,p.249, Footnote.
[2]Brookfield,op.cit.,p.8.
[3]Ibid.,Vol.1,p.260.
[4]ll.10-28 of Conclusion. Poetical Works, Rolfe.

with its maidens in lilac and daffodil has a gorgeous quality that is sheer delight. The skill of the poet in presenting through six men and four women every possible attitude toward the woman question is admirable. The petty jealousies of women in their organizations is subtly suggested. The lyrics introduced are exquisite.

But the hybrid quality which Tennyson, himself, pointed out is the essential weakness of The Princess. Tennyson later sought to justify himself by saying that "if women ever were to play such freaks, the burlesque and the tragic might go hand in hand."[1] But this is not convincing. In this connection Shakespeare's use of the comic is instructive. Hamlet, an extremely complex character is the only tragic figure in his plays who is the cause of laughter. The humor does not come through Macbeth, Othello, Lear, Romeo or Brutus, but rather from background characters and the situations. But in The Princess the burlesque and solemnity alternate. Moreover, they are not parts of a clearly thought out design, but material the author could not subdue to artistic ends. The result is an incongruous duality which is in sharp contrast to the superb unity of the Rape of the Lock. The reader in the latter poem once having adjusted himself to the playful mockery is never abruptly shifted back to the world of reality. Besides this basic lack of harmony, there are other incongruities which

[1] Memoir, Vol.I, p.256.

come as barriers between the reader and a full enjoyment of the story. The study by the young women of "shale and horne-blend" is not in keeping with the stage of society in which disagreements between kings are settled by tourney. The result of the battle is too serious to be in tune with the ludicrous fiasco of the disguised young men. The modernity of the whole picture does not tally with a land where a princess can so easily decree death. Certain ludicrous scenes are so inartistic that they are almost painful to the reader. It is all very well to see Fluellen and Falstaff tumbled about but not the father of the Prince and the sweet gentlemen of his court.[1]

The character of the Princess produces in the reader this same shifty feeling. We are expected to admire her. We are told that Tennyson considered her one of the noblest of his women.[2] The more lioness in a woman, the greater the woman tamed, he thought. But we find her not a little childish, sometimes a scold, and in her great moments grandiloquent. We note the effect she produces upon others in the story:

Her father says:

> then, Sir, awful odes she wrote,
> Too awful, sure, for what they treated of.
> But all she is and does is awful.[3]

Lady Psyche:

> oh, that iron will,
> That axe-like edge, unturnable, our Head.[4]

1 Cf. Part iv, ll.527-535 and Part v, ll.330-333.
2 Memoir, Vil.I, p.245.
3 Works, Parti, ll.137-139.
4 Ibid., Part ii, ll.185-187.

Florian, admiring Melissa, finds her

> Not like your Princess crammed with erring pride.[1]

Her father:

> We knew not your ungracious laws, which learnt
> We, conscious of what temper you are built
> Came all in haste to hinder wrong.[2]

Her actions are in keeping with these comments. The Prince to show that he has not come into her realm unauthorized hands her her father's letter:

> which she caught and dashed
> Unopened at her feet; a tide of fierce
> Invective seemed to wait behind her lips.[3]

After the discovery of the disguise:

> She sent for Psyche; but she was not there
> she called
> For Psyche's child to cast it from the door.[4]

It is clear that in portraying the Princess, Tennyson did not succeed in doing what he intended.

The Prince, on the other hand Tennyson intended for a weakling. In 1851 the weird seizures of the Prince were inserted. "His too emotional temperament was intended from an artistic point of view to emphasize his comparative want of power."[5] In addition he is blue-eyed "with lengths of yellow ringlets like a girl." His delicacy is indicated by the long

[1] Works, Part III, l.86.
[2] Works, op.cit., Part Iv, ll.379-381.
[3] Ibid, Part IV, 449-451.
[4] Ibid, Part Iv, ll.217-218.
[5] Memoir, Vol.I, p.251.

illness which results from his wounds. But aside from these externals he is the strongest character in the poem. He takes the initiative in proposing to go to the kingdom of the Princess. He rescues the Princess from drowning. With good sense and penetration he sees that war between the kings would result from an effort to enforce the death sentence. He recognizes the inscription for the farce it is:

> for that inscription there
> I think no more of deadly lurks therein
> Than in a clapper clapping in a garth
> To scare the fowl from fruit.[1]

War, he knows would end the enterprize of the Princess. He knows, too, the revulsion of feeling that would come to her, having wrought such devastation. But he does not counsel gentle measures from any unmanly fear of war:

> And I that prated peace, when first I heard
> War music, felt the blind beast of force
> Whose home is in the sinews of a man
> Stir in me as to strike.[2]

His conception of woman and her relation to man is the most intelligent of any expressed in the poem.[3] Old Gama recognized in him "a gallant and a gracious Prince." Instead of taking the shadow for the substance, he sees his goal clearly and makes for it with commendable directness. Such is the real character. It is clear that in his portrayal of the Prince, Tennyson has not succeeded in doing what he intended.

[1] Works, Part II, ll.207-210.
[2] Ibid., Part V, ll255-258.
[3] Ibid., Part VII, ll.239-280.

The value of Tennyson's interpretation of the Woman problem is not the concern of this study only as it bears on his style. With reference to this aspect of it we note that he has taken middle ground though his views were somewhat in advance of his day. When all is said he leaves woman in a subordinate position. She is "to set herself to man". This view together with the obvious conclusion that matrimony is best and that there is such a thing as "distinctive womanhood" has in the long run the best chance for universality, our present age of boyish girls and sexless womanhood, being if signs do not fail, a transitory aberration from the normal. The events, themselves work out the thesis indirectly and more artistically than the long speeches; but the clash of wills and ideas is lively and dramatic, colored now with humor, now with indignation.

But it sometimes happens that a poet in developing a theme lapses into the sentimental. Tennyson is guilty of this fault in The Princess. Mention has been made of his pre-occupation with the subject of marriage and parenthood. A brief survey of this pre-occupation is in place here. One of the things which endears Tennyson to the reader of his biographies is his love from youth to old age for children, his tenderness and devotion to them, his happiness in sharing in their play. The death of his son, Lionel who was buried in the Red sea, meant for him a grief so poignant and lasting that we cannot read the poem which reveals it without a shudder.[1] His reverence for womanhood was natural because his experience was largely confined to women of nobility and charm.

[1]Works, op.cit., p.526.

Natural as was this bent of character, it received emphasis from certain conditions in his life. Freudians would say that his nature had been too long repressed by his long engagement. However this may be, the quality was emphasized by the ideals of the time. The domesticity of the Queen and her numerous progeny led Victorians to emphasize marriage and family life. Tennyson seems to have preferred married love to romantic love as a theme for poetry. The following poems deal with marriage, motherhood, or childhood: The Miller's Daughter, The Gardener's Daughter, Dora, Lady Clare, The Lord of Burleigh, Enoch Arden, The Wreck, Rizpah, The First Quarrel, The Sisters, The Village Wife, Despair, Sea Dreams, Happy, Romney's Remorse. In the Dramas, the subject is prominent in Queen Mary, Becket, Harold, The Falcon, and The Cup. The subject of marriage is central in The Idylls of the King and The Princess. Nothing roused Tennyson's indignation more than the thwarting of marriage for the sake of wealth or convenience. This is treated in Aylmer's Field, The Lover's Tale, Maud, The Locksley Hall poems and others. Phrases and illustrations drawn from this relation were used with frequency. The Lady of Shalott sees two young lovers "lately wed." Isabel has the laws of marriage charactered upon her heart. The speaker in The Two Voices is brought out of his despair by the sweet unity of father, mother, and child walking to church. Elegy XCVII of In Memoriam is an extended illustration drawn from the married relation beginning:

> Two partners of a married life
> I looked in these and thought of thee
> In vastness and in mystery
> And of my spirit as of a wife.

In cantos XL, LX, LXII, LXXXIV, LXXV, marriage is brought in by way of allusion or metaphor. One of the most amusing instances of misplaced Victorianism is the drama The Foresters. A complete code of nineteenth century manners and morals is transferred to the good greenwood. Maidens will allow no liberties. Thus Maid Marian to Robin:

> Robin, I will not kiss thee
> For that belongs to marriage; but I hold thee
> The husband of my heart, the noblest light
> That ever flashed across my life, and I
> Embrace thee with the kisses of the soul.[1]

In The Death of Oenone Tennyson goes beyond all bounds im distorting the lovely myth. After criticisimg Tennyson's inartistic variant of the story, Stopford Brooke confesses:

> Nor do I understand the husband and wife and widow business unless it be that Tennyson desired to express over again his devotion to the eternity and sanctity of the marriage relation. This is wholly out of place in the story. The union between the nymph Oenone and Paris was not a marriage nor anything that resembled it. When we come to
>
> Her husband in the dawn and flush of youth
>
> We do not know where we are....And the end is equally out of the question. It is a pretty thought in itself and might well belong to a mortal woman or even to an Oriental pagan, but it does not belong to a mountain nymph of the Greek imagination who never dreamed of marriage and would have smiled at any union of the kind.[2]

These illustrations indicate an over-emphasis on the part

[1] Works, op.cit., Act III, Sc.1, ll.80-84.
[2] Brooke, op.cit., pp.142-144.

of Tennyson in the treatment of marriage and motherhood. An instance in The Princess is the introduction of the child into the story. In reality,the child is superfluous to the plot. Lady Psyche who first discovers the disguise of the young men is disloyal to her Head by keeping the secret--her justification being that one of the young men is her brother and,as she supposes,in danger of the death penalty. For this the Princess can first spurn and then forgive her. What more is needed? When King Gama and the Prince's father appeal to Ida,it is that she be reconciled with Psyche,no mention being made of the child. Here in fact,we have a piece of sentimental machinery dragged in. No one will deny the beauty of the married relation,parenthood,and the appeal of children. But with Tennyson this aspect aspect of life was almost an obsession. These are matters about which finely tempered natures feel deeply and say least.

This,however,is not the accepted view. J.W.Dawson in his comment on The Princess has given excessive praise to this feature of the poem. Rolfe in quoting this,[1] confesses that he himself had felt that the child was the heroine of the piece and was pleased to discover that another interpreter held the same view and that this was the intention of the author.[2] It is true that an emotional unity may have been secured by this means. But there is too much emotion,sentimentality,in fact,if not downright mushiness. The child does give occasion to a

1 Works,p.871
2 Memoir,Vol.I,p.255.

charming picture with Cyril and to a stirring speech by Cyril as he pleads for the Princess to surrender the babe to Psyche. Aside from that, we have the sentimental picture of Ida going on the battlefield with the child in her arms, of her kneeling over the wounded Prince on one knee with the babe on the other. We have also these passages:

> At once the lost lamb at her feet
> Sent out a bitter bleating for its dam.[1]

> She took it, Pretty bud!
> Lily of the vale! Half-opened bell of the woods!
> Sole comfort of my dark hour, when a world
> Of traitorous friend and broken system made
> No purple in the distance, mystery,
> Pledge of a love not to be mine, farewell!
> . . . . . .
> We two must part; and yet how fain was I
> To think thy cause embraced in mine, to dream
> I might be something to thee, when I felt
> Thy helpless warmth about my barren breast
> In the dead prime.[2]

> Then hugged and never hugged it close enough
> And in her hunger mouthed and mumbled it
> And hid it in her bosom.[3]

> Wan was her cheek
> With hollow watch, her blooming mantle torn,
> Red grief and mother hunger in her eye,
> And down dead-heavy sank her curls, and half
> The sacred mother's bosom, panting, burst
> The laces toward her babe.[4]

Another indication that Tennyson had not thought his matter out has to do with style. We have in this poem a fitful shifting between two modes which mix as oil and water--

[1] Works, p.139, ll.372-373.
[2] Ibid., op.cit., p.152, ll.176-186.
[3] Ibid., p.152, ll.195-199.
[4] Ibid., p.151, ll.128-134.

didacticism and virtuosity. The poem redounds in detailed decoration. The Homeric simile used so frequently seems to require subject-matter more remote. This and other embroideries suggest that the poet has let himself go. To give a few examples:

> and I sat down and wrote
> In such a hand as when a field of corn
> Bows all its ears before the roaring East.[1]

> Eight daughters of the plow, stronger than men,
> Huge women blowzed with health and wind and rain,
> And labor. Each was like a druid rock
> Or like a spire of land that stands apart
> Cleft from the main and wailed about with mews.[2]

Not infrequently facial expression or other physiological function is decorated by a far-fetched comparison usually from landscape:

> and glowing full-faced welcome she
> Began address us and was moving on
> In gratulation, till as when a boat
> Tacks and the slackened sail flaps, all her voice
> Faltering and fluttering in her throat.[3]

> But Ida with a voice that like a bell
> Tolled by an earthquake in a trembling tower
> Rang ruin.[4]

> she read till, over brow
> And cheek and bosom brake the wrathful bloom
> As of some fire against a stormy cloud
> When the wild peasant rights himself, the rick
> Flames and his anger reddens in the heavens.[5]

[1] Works, Part xxxi, ll.232-235.
[2] Ibid., opcit., Part iv, ll.259-263.
[3] Ibid., Part ii, ll.167-170.
[4] Ibid., Part vii, ll.313-315.
[5] Ibid., Part iv, ll.363-367.

These are beauties, no doubt. That is the trouble. The plural number is significant.

In this duality of aim and style and character delineation lies the real failure of the poem and not so much in the long speeches though these are too long and undramatic--even savoring of the lecture or address which present directly the main thesis. But here we find as a rule ease, grace, and exceptional blank verse. That some of these passages have become trite through quotation does not mar their excellence. On the other hand a passage is not good poetry because many have loved it. "For woman is not undeveloped man but diverse" is as bad as Browning's "Irks care the cropfull bird?" Occasional lapses into prose in longer passages occur:

> some said their heads were less;
> Some men's were small; not they the least of men;
> For often fineness compensated size;
> Besides the brain was like the hand, and grew
> With using; thence the man's, if more, was more.[1]

But having exonerated the poet from complete failure in presenting directly the thesis of woman's rights, we must hasten to qualify this view. Neither has he wholly succeeded. The danger was not so much of falling into prose as falling into grandiloquence. If we compare Tennyson's presentation of ideas in Ulysses, The Two Voices, and In Memoriam, with that in The Princess, we shall find the latter poem falls far short of what Tennyson could do in this way. This goes back to his choice of theme which, though it greatly increased the number

[1]Works, op.cit., Part ii, ll.131-136.

of his readers, was an unfortunate concession to his public.

III

The Laureateship and the poems of occasion which were the outcome of the office were often third-rate, bearing the labored, made-to order quality so often found in such poetry. We must except certain poems dealing with events which called forth the poet's enthusiasm as The Charge of the Light Brigade, The Defence of Lucknow, The Revenge, and The Charge of the Heavy Brigade. The latter poem, however, is followed by an argumentative epilogue which sadly wants the old fire, or as Fitzgerald would have said the "champagne-magic" of the earlier poetry.

As to the pieces which dealt with persons, not a single one can be called true poetry of homage such as Arnold rendered to Shakespeare, Wordsworth to Milton, and Markheim to Lincoln. The taint of the panegyric is over them all, not excepting the Ode on the Death of Wellington. This poem has received great praise. Andrew Lang called it a "stately and moving Ode, a splendid heroic piece."[1] Alfred Lyall considered the poem unique in sustaining the heroic tone at a high level of harmony.[2] Grierson wrote of it as a "bold metrical experiment, the motif for which was the funeral march and the pomp of obsequies in St. Pauls."[3] Brooke comments thus on its technical excellence:

[1] Andrew Lang, op.cit., p.80.
[2] Alfred Lyall, op.cit., p.78.
[3] C.H. Grierson, op.cit.,

> This is, however, as great a poem as the character which was celebrated. The metrical movement rushes where it ought to rush, and delays where it ought to delay. Were the poem set by Handel its rhythmic movement could scarcely be more fit from point to point to the things spoken of, more full of stately, happy changes. Moreover, the conduct of the piece is excellent. ... The conduct, then, is the conduct of one form of the true lyric, that whose climax is in the midst.[1]

Brooke especially admires the reference to Nelson.

After such praise, one needs a degree of temerity to say anything in disfavor of the poem. But since even the best of critics sometimes have the habit of following suit, it will be well to scrutinize this ode somewhat narrowly and with unprejudiced eyes. It would be folly to deny to it some fine passages. It has, more-over, beauty in the wave-like rise and fall of emotion. And it has fine progress and a satisfying cadence at the close. But here the praise ends.

The diction of the poem is quite undistinguished, even falling into bathos. He persists in referring to the body of the hero as his bones. The mourning of an empire is noise. Wellington is "the man whom we deplore." The connotation is dubious, but let it pass, for the poet needs a rhyme for "roar." But the lack of distinction in choice of words will be seen best in passages. Consider the opening prose line, "Bury the great Duke." If one may take liberties with the incorrigible Jeffrey, this wavers--but not prettily--between bluntness and ejaculatory prayer. Other lines show the laboring of the poet's Muse. Indeed it would be hard to find another poem of equal length by any reputable poet which con-

[1]Brooke, p.254.

tains more commonplace passages. The following will illustrate:

> Mourn, for to us he seems the last
> Remembering all his greatness in the past.[1]
>
> And as the greatest only are.[2]
>
> and whatever tempests lour
> Forever silent; even if they broke
> In thunder silent; yet remember all
> He spoke among you and the Man who spoke.[3]
>
> He that ever following her commands
> On with toil of heart and knees and hands
> Thro' the long gorge to the far light has won
> His path upward and prevailed.[4]
>
> He that walks it, only thirsting
> For the right and learns to deaden
> Love of self before his journey closes.[5]
>
> Until we doubt not that for one so true
> There must be other noble work to do.[6]
>
> Being here and we believe him
> Something far advanced in state.[7]
>
> And underneath another sun
> Warring on a later day
> Round affrighted Lisbon drew
> The treble works, the vast designs
> Of his labored rampart-lines,
> Where he greatly stood at bay
> Whence he issued forth anew
> And ever great and greater grew.[8]

[1] Works, p.223, ll.19-20.
[2] Ibid., p.223, l.33.
[3] Ibid., p.225, ll.175-179.
[4] Ibid., p.225, ll.221-225.
[5] Ibid., p.225, ll.203-205.
[6] Ibid., p.226, ll.255-256.
[7] Ibid., p.226, ll.274-275.
[8] Ibid., p.224, ll.101-109.

In that dread sound to the great name
Which he has worn so pure of blame.
In praise and in sispraise the same.[1]

It was Tennyson's habit to kick the geese out of the boat as he said, referring to the sibilants. He certainly forgot to do so in the last line quoted.

By way of contrast, let us drop at random into the heart of another memorial ode:[2]

Nothing of Europe here
Or then, of Europe fronting mornward still,
Ere any names of Serf and Peer
Could Nature's equal scheme deface
And thwart her genial will;
Here was a type of the true elder race
And one of Plutarch's men talked with us face to face.

Turning a page our eyes fall upon this:

We feel the orient of their spirit glow,
Part of our life's unalterable good,
Of all our saintlier aspiration;
They come transfigured back.
Secure from change in their light-hearted ways,
Beautiful evermore, and with the rays
Of morn on their white shields of Expectation.

The random method is manifestly unfair; but an examination of the poem from which these extracts are taken reveals no single passage so bad as any one of the nine just quoted from Tennyson's ode; and Tennyson's ode contains nothing so fine as the second passage quoted from Lowell's ode. The latter poem is not very well known, and was written by a poet who

[1] Works, p.224, ll.71-73.
[2] James Russell Lowell, Ode Recited at the Harvard Commemoration, quoted from Page's Chief American Poets, pp.490-496.

could in no way be compared with Tennyson.

Something, of course, must be conceded to the poet's purpose. Tennyson wished to reproduce the pageantry of the funeral in the streets of London and in the Abbey. But one is amazed at the number of grim details he has assembled: bones, mould, tolling bells, the sable car, sobs and tears, ashes to ashes, the yawning grave, the Dead March. Surely no poet of the graveyard school could do more, though his details would probably be less trite. The pageantry of war is also attempted with better success, but it is feeble beside Tennyson's description of the last weird battle of Arthur or even the tournament in The Princess. But battle pieces have not the quality which makes a poem a heritage "for all time".

Two passages are especially unfortunate. The idea of comparing Wellington with Nelson is good. But Tennyson's handling of it is not the happiest. He represents Nelson as inquiring:

> Who is he that cometh like an honored guest
> With banner and with music, with soldier and with priest?[1]

The reader gropes a little. Just where is Nelson? He is in the Abbey. In his grave. Alas! we had supposed him in heaven. But how are we to image this? It would be more dignified for Nelson if we picture him as maintaining the recumbent position as he puts the question. But to one reader, at least, he appears as rising on the leverage of his elbows and making

[1]Works, p.224, ll.80-81.

the inquiry with petulance. For are we not told that the funeral procession is breaking on his rest? Indeed this could have been managed otherwise. A momentary shifting of the scene, and we could envisage the spirit of Nelson coming to meet the spirit of Wellington at the Gate of the Celestial City, or leaning over the parapet of heaven to welcome him. As it is, he rises from his coffin out of curiosity to see who is to occupy the next grave, and in no good humor.

Another passage is to be regretted:

> A people's voice! we are a people yet,
> Tho' all men else their noble dreams forget,
> Confused by brainless mobs and lawless powers;
> Thank him who isled us here and roughly set
> His Briton in rough seas and storming showers
> . . . . . .
> O Statesman guard us, guard the soul
> Of Europe, keep our noble England whole
> And save the one true seed of freedom sown
> Betwixt a people and their ancient throne.
> . . . . . .
> But wink no more in slothful overtrust.
> Remember him who led your hosts;
> He bade you guard the sacred coasts.[1]

This passage breathes a narrow insularity which grew upon Tennyson with the years. It is true as he said in a poem that, "He is the best cosmopolite who loves his native country best;"[2] but Tennyson was far too willing to justify his limited sympathies and an outlook which was scarcely European in breadth. He appears at a disadvantage in this respect when compared with Coleridge, Carlyle, Browning and

[1] Works, p.225, ll.151-171.
[2] Ibid., p.515, Hands All Round.

Byron. The lines hold, too, a covert dislike of France. This is more openly expressed in The Princess; the Tory member's son looking across the sea and imagining the France that lies beyond exclaims:

> God bless the narrow sea which keeps her off.
> . . . . . .
> I wish they were a whole Atlantic broad.[1]

But the most damaging thing which can be said about the Ode is that it is panegyric rather than true homage. If poetry has not sincerity, it can lay no claim to greatness. Wellington had lived down the unpopularity which arose in the thirties from his opposition to the Reform bill. When he died he had the respect of his countrymen, and deserved a tribute. But he did not deserve the superlatives which the Laureate bestowed so freely upon him. Two of the finest lines of the poem are:

> And let the mournful, martial music blow;
> The last great Englishman is low.[2]

But unfortunately they were not true. Brooke thus comments on the Duke's public career:

> What he did in politics was always questionable. He was nothing of a statesman as Tennyson calls him. He proved his inability when he was called to the Premiership. Then he was first ignorant. Then he was perplexed by the mischief he had wrought. Indeed, he was profoundly ignorant of England. But when he found out his ignorance, he had the good sense of a great general. He knew when to retreat and he retreated.[3]

[1] Works, p.161, l.51, l.71.
[2] Ibid., p.223, ll.27-28.
[3] Brooke, op.cit., p.232.

Such he was. But by such phrases as, "our chief state-oracle," the "man of amplest influence," "great in council," "England's greatest son," the poet loses the assent of the reader.

The poem in addition to grave faults of style and the selection of material has not, then, the genuine note of great poetry. It is local and temporary. It manifests a love of military trappings and sets forth a narrow self-gratulating patriotism which is now passing away. It has been treated somewhat at length because it is representative of the decline in quality which is sure to result when a poet is not absolutely free in his choice of theme or when he undertakes too consciously to represent his age and country.

To the same class belong other official poems of Tennyson as Laureate. The Third of February, although it is a manly appeal for freedom of the press, came at a time when reasonable caution in the utterances of a nation might have been the better part of valor.[1] Here again, we have the intemperate "We love not this French God, the child of Hell,"[2] and "No little German state are we, But the one voice of Europe."[3] In the Ode Sung at the Opening of the International Exhibition one would think that Tennyson might have forgotten his Britishness, but even here he devotes some twenty odd lines to the Prince Consort. When the Indian and Colonial exhibition was to be opened the Laureate pro-

[1]Soon after the coup of Louis Napoleon by which he made himself master of France.
[2]Works, p.269.
[3]Ibid., p.269.

duced at the request of the Prince of Wales a poem on a theme near his heart--the unity of the colonies and dominions. His imperialism was an exuberant,not to say rank growth. In the poem on the Queen's Jubilee he provides neat rules of conduct for statesman and layman. This is good journalistic verse but scarcely deserves a place in his works. The one delightful poem of the class is the Welcome to Alexandra of 1863. Essentially lyric in theme,it has graciousness and grace set to a swift,bounding rhythm,unlabored,suggesting a poet who was happy while he wrote it. But it stands alone.

IV

One other venture in the realm of contemporary thought, The Promise of May was unsuccessful. This was partly due to its moralistic tone. It is a story of seduction. A young man of weak character is misled by dipping into the free-thought of his day. The play subjected Tennyson to much criticism,Lord Queensberry rising in the theater during a performance to call the hero a caricature of the honest free-thinker of the time. This led to a vigorous denial of such intention by Tennyson. The analysis of the character by his son in the Memoir,met his approval. According to this Edgar,the hero,was not intended to represent a typical socialist or free-thinker,but a weak character.[1] An examination of the text,however,leads only to one conclusion: the views the hero sets forth are the cause of

1 "Edgar is not as the critics will have it,a free-thinker drawn into crime by his Communistic theories; Edgar is not even an honest Radical,nor a sincere follower of Schopenhauer; he is nothing thorough and nothing sincere."Memoir,Vol.II,p.268.

his lax morals;

> This author with his charm of style
> And close dialectic all but proving man
> An automatic series of sensations,
> Has often numbed me into apathy
> Against the unpleasant jolts of this rough road
> That breaks off short into the abysses--
> . . . . . .
> What can a man then live for but sensations?[1]

The drama is in prose and blank verse with free use of the aside and the soliloquy which Tennyson believed to have a legitimate place in play-writing. The blank verse is in reality,neat lucid prose. If the above passage be compared even with the severe iambics of Dora,it will be apparent that Tennyson has used such freedom in the use of the caesura and run-on lines as to throw the whole into the rhythm of prose. All we need is the illusion of printing it as prose:

> I am glad it pleases you; yet I,born here,not only love the country,but its inhabitants,too; and you,I doubt not would take to them as kindly if you cared to live some time among them.[2]

The poem is interesting as showing Tennyson in a new light. The "riddle of the painful earth" which so perplexed him is here set forth in the flat certainties of the cynic and libertine. Through Edgar he spread his ideas out so that he could look at them with detachment,and it must have been a good poetical exercise. The heaviness of the piece is relieved by some good lyrics and the delightful presentation of northern peasant character.

1 Works,p.734,ll.209-232.
2 Ibid.,p.744,ll.401-405.

But his son's view that in the portrayal of the awakening conscience of Edgar "the poet manifested his fullest and subtlest strength," is not tenable. This feature is managed after the manner of the old-fashioned Sunday School book when a sinner is brought to repentance. Nor is the reader convinced that the young man "quits the scene never again,we believe,to renew his libertine existence,but to expiate with life-long contrition the monstrous wickedness of the past." [1] The denouement is weak,incomplete,awkward,and the pathos,mawkish. It was a poor play,and Tennyson should have taken his medicine.

V

Tennyson preserved his mental vigor and warm-hearted sympathies to the last. The inevitable decline in the quality of his poetry was in part that which comes with advancing years. But it was not wholly due to this cause. In his later life he was conservative,aristocratic,and insular. In religion he was wistfully struggling to maintain in his heart that orthodoxy represented by his outward life. These qualities are not necessarily hostile to the production of great poetry, but they are often so. They seem to manifest a closing up rather than an opening out of the nature. This temper in the man was accentuated by a self-consciousness growing out of the Laureateship and his popularity. Together these attribute made way for an unconscious didacticism. More and more he chose themes with his eyes on his public,and assumed the role of the preacher. For example,the subject of freedom runs through all his poetry like a thread of gold,based as one interpreter

1 Memoir,Vol.II,p.270.

believed on his distaste for the Calvinistic theology.[1] But a late poem on the subject,[2] good, though it is, has not the glow and splendor of the early "Of old sat Freedom on the heights" nor of the chant in The Poet beginning, "And Freedom reared in that august sunrise."[3] The late lyric is too heavily weighted with thought. The poet has heard in the intervening years the still sad music of humanity, but it has not helped the poem. His leaning away from democratic sentiment gave rise to the biting phrases about the "lawless crowd," "Labor with a groan and not a voice.""till crowds at length be sane", "civic manhood firm against the crowd," and the devastating picture in The Dead Prophet:

> Dead!
> And the Muses cried with a stormy cry
> "Send them no more, forevermore.
> Let the people die.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> She tore the prophet after death
> And the people paid her well.

His imperialism crystallized into an attitude too exclusively British. He was slightly too vociferous in his belief that the English were the "mightiest people under heaven."[4] No doubt there was an aesthetic as well as a patriotic appeal in the "Ocean-empire" and his own "fair isle". In spite of his utterances on universal peace, the warlike tone of some

[1] E.H. Sneath in The Mind of Tennyson, pp.76-105.
[2] Works, Freedom, p.516.
[3] Ibid., p.512.
[4] Ibid., To The Queen, p.450, ll.21.

of his later poetry brought criticism upon him.[1] And indeed, such journalistic verse as The Fleet and Rifleman,Form, seem to place him in the stream of the Time-spirit as far as war is concerned,and not above it. His answer to the criticism was made in the Epilogue to The Charge of the Heavy Brigade:

> he needs must fight
> To make true peace his own,
> He needs must combat might with might
> Or might would rule alone.[2]

It will be seen that these poems in which the intellectual element may be compared to an alloy not completely amalgamated, usually deal with matters of expediency or ethics. Even these subjects Tennyson sometimes lifted to the level of poetry,as we shall see,by the way of satire. When it came,however, to ideas of a speculative nature,he is seldom didactic. The difference between ethical and speculative thought as material for poetry was mentioned on page 38 of this thesis. It should be emphasized here. The former,pertaining to conduct,lends itself easily to moralizing. The latter has more of the timeless quality and lies closer to one of the primary sources of poetry--Wonder. Nor have these themes been worn out by use through the centuries. Rather have they been enriched by their very complexity as witness the sonnet-sequence of Masefield on Beauty. Tennyson's dealing with religious and

1 The Memoir tells us that Tennyson was offended by the way those who did not know him repeatedly accused him of loving war. Consequently he wrote

> And who loves War for War's own sake,
> Is fool or crazed or worse. Vol.II,p.320.

2 Works,p.510.

philosophical subjects resulted in some of his greatest poetry.

But something more should be said of the poetry considered in this chapter and its relation to didacticism. That The Princess is sentimental and has an inartistic duality of style does not make it didactic. Nor is the Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington didactic because it shows poor taste and contains many dull passages. Nevertheless,it can be maintained that these faults appear because the author has chosen subjects alien to his temperament; and he has chosen these subjects out of an unmistakable desire to teach. The didactic element in poetry may be so evident that we can strike a finger on on a passage and say of the poem, "Thou ailest here." It may also be a pervasive thing and may less definitely but just as surely color the poems of a whole period. Grierson was thinking of this more subtle type when he spoke of Tennyson's "timid morality." Lyall was thinking of it in this way when he referred to the poet's leaving the true path in order to modify and direct thought. Both the direct teaching and the pervasive moralistic coloring are evident in The Princess and the poems of the Laureateship.

As interpreter of the thought of his day,we may say,then, that when Tennyson dealt with questions of policy or ethics,as woman's rights,imperialism,war,marriage,he produced poetry which was not firstrate in quality. It lacked evenness of texture,clearness of design,was sometimes provincial in tone,given to the homiletic or panegyric strain. In style it frequently fell to the level of the journalistic. As Laureate he wrote more quasi-official poetry than either of his two able predecessors,Dryden or Wordsworth. It is to be regretted that he so frequently turned his attention to themes that led him into didacticism.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SATIRE AND INVECTIVE

I

The purpose of the study of the didacticism of Tennyson is not wholly negative. To point out where his conception that the poet should be a teacher impaired the quality of his work and to total the amount of poetry so impaired is one aspect of the problem. It is equally important to discover how far he was able to transcend the didactic influences of his own circle and age and the cumulative pressure of his English predecessors and classic example.

In using fact and abstract truth as the basis of poetry Tennyson's success is as great as his failure. He had the genius to lift material essentially prose in nature to the realm of poetry by the way of satire and by conceiving it imaginatively and suffusing it with noble emotion. His use of satire is the subject of this chapter.

The greater part of Tennyson's poetry was motivated by a far different temper from that of satire. But a considerable amount of poetry in this vein appears incidentally throughout his work,and he wrote a few pieces of pure satire. This aspect of his poetry has received scant notice from his interpreters. The critical biographies of Benson,Waugh,Nicolson,and Fausset do not deal with it. Nor do Stopford A.Brooke,Henry Vandyke or Taine. The monographs of Grierson,Lang,and Harrison make

no mention of satire. Hugh Walker in English Satire and Satirists does not include Tennyson. Lyall calls attention to the satirical quality of St.Simeon Stylites,and Alfred Noyes devotes two pages to the subject in his essay on the poet.[1]

A study of Tennyson's satire must not ignore his humor. The observing reader of his poetry will notice the pure fun of Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue,and Amphion,the delicious comic spirit of his sketches of the Lincolnshire peasantry,the Sophoclean irony of Harold and The Last Tournament. To this basic humor we may add the critical vein,a propensity for wit and the pregnant saying. The dark blood in him betokened melancholy. Here are the elements needed for good satire. And we have it in the Juvenalian manner,and occasionally in the thoughtful laughter of Horace or the pointed epigram of Pope.

Tennyson looked out on his world and saw much that was wrong. From time to time throughout his poetic career he directed satirical thrusts against democracy,wealth,the press, the marriage of convenience,the idea of progress. The full volume of his scorn fell upon the cruelties of the social system. Human futility--that prolific theme for the satirist--sometimes engaged his thought,but his treatment of this subject usually resulted in the poetry of despair. In types he ranged from the descriptive portrait to the slight vignette,the dramatic portrait,and an intermediate type in which a character gives direct satiric comment. Sometimes in the character of

1 "Tennyson and Recent Critics",Some Aspects of Modern Poetry, New York,1924.

author Tennyson steps upon the stage to parry and thrust. Epigram and the satiric stroke are not wanting.

There are, to borrow epithets used in another connection by William James, tough-minded satirists and tender-minded satirists. To the former belong the imperturbable Anatole France with his urbane mockery and Voltaire with his malicious impudence. Equally tough-minded are Horace, Chaucer, Addison, Dryden, Pope and Moliere, for they see perfectly the human predicament and the follies of men, but do not desire to do anything about it. They have fun with their minds as spectators of the comedie humaine. There are, on the other hand, tender-minded satirists who see all and greatly care. To this class belong Juvenal of the moral earnestness and sorrowing scorn, and Thomas Hardy denouncing the God he does not believe in. And to this class belongs Tennyson.

Tennyson does, however, sometimes show the mellow, genial quality. One of his earliest efforts is the poem, A Character, directed against S--a self-satisfied speaker at the Union Debating Society. It seems to anticipate the kind of thing Edwin Arlington Robinson has done so well:

> With a half-glance upon the sky
> At night he said, "The wanderings
> Of this most intricate universe
> Teach me the nothingness of things."
> Yet could not all creation pierce
> Beyond the bottom of his eye.
>
> He spake of beauty: that the dull
> Saw no divinity in grass,
> Life in dead stones or spirit in air;
> Then looking as it were in a glass,
> He smoothed his chin and sleeked his hair,
> And said the earth was beautiful.

He spake of virtue,not the gods
More purely when they wish to charm,
Pallas and Juno sitting by
And with a sweeping of the arm
And a lack-luster,dead-blue eye,
Devolved his rounded periods.

Most delicately hour by hour
He canvassed human mysteries,
And trod on silk as if the winds
Blew his own praises in his eyes,
And stood aloof from other minds
In impotence of fancied power.

With lips depressed as he were meek,
Himself unto himself he sold:
Upon himself,himself did feed;
Quiet,dispassionate and cold,
And other than his form of creed, [1]
With chiseled features,clear and sleek.

This is quoted in full because it is an excellent thing of its kind and needs to be rescued from the Juvenilia where it lies buried. Could sophomoric speciousness and the Narcissus psychology be better expressed? How exquisitely transparent is the character,how self-revealing to all but himself. Characteristic of the early Tennyson are the touches of facial expression and gesture. But the poem contains two features which are much used in dealing with ideas in his later work."Himself unto himself he sold"has the compression and point of epigram. More significant is,"In impotence of fancied power." Every word is abstract,but how weighty the implication and,taken with the context,how poetical!

In this poem Tennyson attains great objectivity. He gets clean outside himself. Equally objective but more subtle is the portrait of ST.Simeon Stylites. Like Dryden in his sketch

1 Works,p.13.

of Achitophel, Tennyson achieves verisimilitude by telling the whole truth. His effort is to understand the saint. Once thoroughly conceived, the character reveals himself through monologue. The treatment is sympathetic and at the same time a pitiless exposure of the basic egoism of the human heart when it seeks the ecstatic experience through the crucificion of the flesh. Another attack on asceticism by the way of satire is the description of Pellam in Balin and Balan.[1] Here the conception is somewhat crude, the asceticism of Pellam being scarcely plausible. He has observed how Arthur's kingdom prospers and turns to the holy life in hope of material profit. Tennyson takes little pains with the portrait; it is all by the way, as the story proceeds. But there is one superb touch. Balin wandering in the chapel of Pellam stares about the shrine, "In which he scarce could spy the Christ for Saints."[2] There is a thrust at celibacy in

> Hath pushed aside his faithful wife, nor lets
> Or dame or damsel at his gates
> Lest he should be polluted.[3]

Pure satire is the early poem, Lady Clara Vere de Vere. Boyish was Tennyson when he wrote it and boyish is the speaker. It is not without an undercurrent of rancour. Slight as it is, the author strikes at the beauty who is a breaker of hearts and at the arrogance of birth;

1 Works, p.359, ll.93-113
2 Ibid., p.363, l.403.
3 Ibid., p.359, ll.103-106.

Chaucerian are many short sketches and keen but good-natured strokes. After ten years of marriage a sweet girl with modest eyes becomes"a woman like a butt and harsh as crabbs." Sometimes the character is suggested in a phrase. "smooth-faced, snub-nosed rogue,"and "a gray old wolf and a lean." Maud is "dead perfection," "faultily faultless,splendidly null." She has"fed on the roses and lilies of life." Sir Edward winces at the sight of a Chartist's pike and shudders lest a cry

> Should break his sleep by night and his nice eyes
> Should see the raw mechanic's bloody thumbs
> Sweat on his blazoned chairs.[1]

The tryst between Letty and her lover is broken by a score of pugs and poodles yelling,

> and out they come
> Trustees and aunts and uncles;[2]

who are characterized as "the cotton-spinning chorus." Letty is wedded to sixty thousand pounds

> And slight Sir Robert with his watery smile
> And educated whisker.[3]

The essence of the satire in the epithets "nice eyes,""educated whisker," "cotton-spinning chorus"is Chaucerian. My lord's castle is"pricking a cockney ear;" his very trees are "perky." Low-grade humanity is sharply etched:

1 Works,p.76,ll.63-65.
2 Ibid.,p.79,ll.120-121.
3 Ibid.,p.79,ll.137-138.

that dandy despot,he,
That jewelled mass of milinery
That oiled and curled Assyrian bull
Smelling of musk and insolence.[1]

A lord,a captain,a padded shape
A bought commission,a waxen face
A rabbit mouth that is ever agape--[2]

No great idea lies back of these briefer passages,but the appeal is to the intellect. They give rise to the thoughtful laughter in which Meredith finds the essence of the Comic spirit.

Another channel for satire was the creation of satirical persons. Lynette is satirical,but in developing the character Tennyson has no views which he wishes to present. Etarre and Vivien are not satirical representing positive evil,though the latter occasionally expresses her philosophy in corrosive language as when she says to Merlin,"Gracious lessons thine,and maxims of the mud."[3] Merlin is the melancholy sage. Gawain,however, drawn with a few strokes,but sharply etched is truly satiric. His philosophy is a cross between belief in the vanity of human wishes and "While you live,drink,for once dead,you never shall return." The knights,caught up in mystic vision,swear to enter upon the Quest,and "Gawain louder than the rest."[4] But light-of-love as he is, he soon wearies of the quest and falls to sporting with merry maidens in a silk pavillion. Holiness, he declares drives men mad,and the quest is not for him:

1 Works,p.203,ll.231-233.
2 Ibid.,p.205,ll.358-360.
3 Ibid.,p.367,.49.
4 Ibid.,p.403,l.202.

> By mine eyes and by mine ears I swear
> I will be deafer than the blue-eyed cat
> To holy virgins in their ecstasies
> Henceforward.[1]

He is best represented by the consciousness of Arthur who hears the dim cry of his ghost,"Hollow,hollow all delight!"

Sir Tristram has also Omar's philosophy. He is more convincing than Gawain as he is more interesting and many-sided. In him Tennyson recognizes that the dark figures in life's drama are not all dark. Tristram is the joyous harper and improviser of songs. He is graceful in the tilt and a lover of the woods. He has had his great moments as when he took upon him the vows of Arthur. And life has not played fair with him and Isolt. Beneath his gayest songs is latent sadness:

> The woods are hushed,their music is no more;
> The leaf is dead,the yearning past away.[2]

Therefore

> Free loves are sweet as those that went before,
> Free love--free/field--we love but while we may.

But the fiber of his nature is coarse. Brazenly he displays the prize of innocence. Isolt who is the not unsullied rose, caught in the tangle of circumstances and soon to be crushed by an evil power beyond her control,feels the coarseness of Tristram and resents it. His satire invades the province of cynicism. The vows,he declares were but the wholesome madness of the hour. He confesses himself a worldling of the

1 Works,p.412,ll.858-865.
2 Ibid.,p.426,ll.275-281.

of the world. No man in the full strength of his physical powers ia pure. The world laughs at it.[1]

But Tristram is no match for little Dagonet. The satire here is handled with rare skill. Whereas Tristram inveighs against the idealism of Arthur and life in general, Dagonet, who is something of a satirist, too, directs his shafts against the type of humanity represented by Tristram. The latter in the dialog does little more than to lay a neat retort upon the lips of Dagonet. Almost Shakespearean is the undercurrent of reflection in this scene. Dagonet is also a moralist. So he dances like a withered autumn leaf in mockery of a tournament in which the cynic, Tristram could win the prize of Innocence to bestow it upon his paramour. But when Tristram plays upon his harp, he stands stock still. The fool also knows the bitterness of life; but if he has wallowed in the dirty pool of Experience, he has washed and can now hear Arthur's music. The climax comes when he tries to vision Arthur making

> Figs out of thistles, silk from bristles, milk
> From burning spurge, honey from hornetcombes,
> And men from beasts[2]

such as Tristram, and he breaks out into a staccato of derision like that of Mephistopheles. By means of this clash between Dagonet who has cleansed his soul and made himself sensitive to the idealism of Arthur, and Tristram who is impervious to it, Tennyson has done more in twenty lines than he could have done in many sermons.

1 Works, p.432, ll.685-690.
2 Ibid., p.426, ll.355-358.

The latent perversity in human nature called forth gleams of satire in unexpected poems. Tennyson began well with the dark-browed sophist of The Poet's Mind, but the figure is flooded out with lyricism. Leofwin in Harold is essentially satirical; Harold and Stigand are occasionally so. The opening scene of Becket is exquisite satire as Henry and the prelate move bishops and kings about on the chessboard. Cyril and the Prince's father in The Princess, each in his way, fling their mockery at the nature of woman. The mock-heroic design of this poem promised much in the way of satire, but was marred in the making by too much lecture and the drifting currents of seriousness. It is doubtful whether Tennyson could have written sustained satire. In darker mood Sir John Oldcastle lashes Catholicism with its cry of heresy, and Columbus in chains mocks the learning of all Spain with "their cosmogonies" and "their astronomies." Devastating is the misanthropy of the senile, death-like figure in The Vision of Sin, sneering at youth, virtue, friendship, liberty, and human hopes; and drinking to Ignorance and Chance. This poem which appeared in 1842, is an objective presentation of the cynical spirit, serving to link the younger Tennyson with the Tennyson of Locksley Hall Sixty Years After. Both poems point to a pessimism in viewing the human scene which is not saved by incidental outbursts of optimism.

II

But the satirical portrait and the dramatic presentation of satirical persons are in the legitimate manner of the artist. The real test of Tennyson's power to write good poetic satire

will be when he undertakes direct attack after the manner of Juvenal. Can he do this without assuming the role of the schoolmaster or the preacher? This method can be seen in Maud, Locksley Hall, and Locksley Hall Sixty years After. The somewhat Byronic heroes of the first two poems, although they are satiric persons, comment on general aspects of life, and through them Tennyson's critical powers are manifest. Tennyson has stated definitely that the hectic youth of the first two poems do not represent his views. The matter of his own opinions in this case is not the question. The concern here is whether the satire is good and whether it is poetry. If it be poetry, is it sane or is it morbid? Discrimination must be made between satire and the poetry of pessimism. When Arnold wrote

> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight
> Where ignorant armies clash by night

he was not writing satire. There is no attack, and the tone is melancholy. On the other hand, invective, attack without humor, is included in the chapter heading because it is so closely akin to satire and is a legitimate type of literature. It must be recognized, too, that the humor of satire is sometimes attenuated and sometimes lies very close to pathos and the tragic. The borders of the three types are, therefore vaguely defined. Without unnecessary hair-splitting, these distinctions will be kept in mind in the discussion which follows. One other caution is necessary. No claim can be made that satire, even when poetry, is poetry of the first rank. The best of it must always take a second place as compared with products of the creative imagination.

In the three poems under consideration Tennyson has given an unsparing picture of his age. The following passages will show the range of subject, the form and spirit of expression:

The pessimist:

So I triumphed ere my passion sweeping through me left me dry,
Left me with the palsied heart, and left me with the jaundiced eye,
Eye to which all order festers, all things here are out of joint.[1]

Woman:

Weakness to be wroth with woman! woman's pleasure, woman's pain--
Nature made them blinder motions, bounded in a shallower brain.

Woman is the lesser man, and all thy passions matched with mine,
Are as moonlight unto starlight and as water unto wine.[2]

The reviewers:

Be mine the philosopher's life in the quiet woodland ways,
Where if I cannot be gay, let a passionless peace be my lot,
Far off from the clamor of liars, belied in a hubbub of lies;
From the long-necked geese of the world that are ever hissing dis-
Because their natures are little, and whether he heed it or not, praise.
Where each man walks with his head in a cloud of poisonous flies.[3]

Realism in literature:

Authors--essayist, atheist, novelist, realist, rhymster, play your part,
Paint the mortal shame of nature with the living hues of art.

Rip your brother's vices open, strip your own foul passions bare;
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence, forward, naked let them stare.

Feed the budding rose of boyhood with the drainage of the sewer,
Send the drain into the fountain, lest the stream should issue pure.

1 Works, p.92, ll.131-132.
2 Ibid., p.93, ll.149-152.
3 Ibid., p.202, ll.149-155. Tennyson shows personal spleen here. To call the passage good would be rash.

Set the maiden fancies wallowing in the troughs of Zolaism--
Forward, forward, ay and backward, downward into the abysm![1]

Other literary satires are The Flower, The Dead Prophet, Poets and Their Bibliographies. From Literary Squabbles, this superb stanza:

> Ah God! the petty fools of rhyme
> That shriek and sweat in pigmy wars,
> Before the stony face of Time,
> And looked at by the silent stars![2]

Main Street:

> Below me there is the village, and look how quiet and small!
> And yet bubbles o'er like a city with gossip scandal and spite.
> And Jack on his ale-house bench has as many lies as a czar.[3]

The ugliness of civilization:

> Yonder lies our young sea village--Art and Grace are less and less!
> Science grows and beauty dwindles--roofs of slated hideousness!
> . . . . . .
> Poor old Heraldry, poor old History, poor old Poetry passing hence![4]

The Church:

> There is none that does his work, not one
> A touch of their office might have sufficed,
> But the churchmen fain would kill their church
> As the churches have killed their Christ.[5]

The candidate:

> What if he had told her yestermorn
> How prettily for his own sweet sake
> A face of tenderness might be feigned,
> And a moist mirage in desert eyes,
> That so when the rotten hustings shake
> In another month to his brazen lies,
> A wretched vote may be gained.[6]

1 Works, p.520, ll.139-148.
2 Ibid., p.272.
3 Ibid., p.201, ll.108-110.
4 Ibid., p.523, ll.245-249.
5 Ibid., p.214-ll.265-267.
6 Ibid., p.203, ll.235-242.

The demagogue:

Plowmen, shepherds, have I found and more than once and still shall find,
Sons of God and kings of men in utter nobleness of mind

Truthful, trustful, looking upward to the practised hustings-liar.
So the higher wields the lower, while the lower is the higher.
. . . . . .
Tumble nature heel o'er head and yelling with the yelling street,
Set the feet above the brain and swear the brain is in the feet.[1]

The newly-rich:

But his essences turned the live air sick
And barbarous opulence jewel-thick,
Sunned itself on his breast and hands.[2]

Obsequiousness:

This newly-made lord whose splendor plucks
The slavish hat from the villager's head
. . . . . .
Strong in the power that all men adore,
And simper and set their faces lower,
And soften as if to a girl, and hold
Awe-stricken breaths at a work divine,
Seeing his gewgaw castle shine
New as his title built last year.[3]

1 Works, p.520, ll.121-136. Tennyson's feeling against democracy seems rather to have been against the demagogue than the people. In an early poem, Love Thou Thy Land, he refers to the people not unkindly as "wild hearts and feeble wings." Farther on he seems to be indicating the difficulty every serious voter feels today:

neither hide the ray
From those not blind who wait for day,
Tho' sitting girt with doubtful ray.
p.61, ll.14-16.

2 Ibid., p.203, ll.454-457.
3 Ibid., p.204, ll.332-338.

Wealth:

> Cursed be the gold that gilds [1]
> the straitened forehead of the fool.
> . . . . . .
> But the jingling of the guineas
> helps the hurt that Honor feels.[2]

These passages are not pretty. It is clear that Tennyson is not always idyllic. One would not call this writing ornate or embroidered. In fact the poet here illustrates to the letter Meredith's definition of the satirist as "a moral agent,often a social scavenger working on a storage of bile." Between those who would call such poetry intemperate,hectic,or morbid and those who would call it good satire,who shall arbitrate? Have we here a matter of taste concerning which it is folly to dispute? To answer these questions we may ask others based on the criteria by which we judge good poetry. If truth is that which fits reality,are these passages true? Do they have the quality of universality which gives pleasure through revelation or recognition? Can it be denied that these questions should be answered in the affirmative? There is even a facet of truth gleaming in the lines about woman. For they let us see into the heart of a sensitive boy who has been thwarted in love. Nor are the ideas latent or expressed in the satire trivial,though that of itself would not bar them out. But it may be objected that Tennyson wants sanity here. And yet sanity is not a synonym for serenity. If the wit seems to lack good breeding, so did that of Aristophanes and Swift.Let us not get so dainty

1 Works,p.90,ll.62.
2 Ibid.,p.921.105.

that we must have our poetry emasculated;that we cannot endure to hear hard,coarse things called by hard coarse names. In fact we get here the pleasure we feel when the villain in the play gets his deserts. The language gives pleasure because it fits the thought so exactly and is full of daring and homely vigor; even when it mounts to invective,we like it. Who does not enjoy Cicero's diatribes against Cataline,or Burke's arraignment of Warren Hastings? And there are highly civilized,well-mannered people who get a vicarious enjoyment from a good round name-calling piece such as Kent hurled at Oswald in King Lear. One more question. Does this satire gain from being in meter? Not necessarily. But being literature by reason of its content and form, it is poetry by reason of its meter.

Other themes drew the poet's fire. Believing as he did in t the union based on love, it is not surprising that he attacks marriage for wealth,title,or social position. This subject had been used in Aylmer's Field. It is much better done in Locksley Hall. We do not hold it against the youth in this poem that he is pettish and moody when he sees the trick life has played upon him. He is naturally high-spirited,sensitive, a lover of beauty and filled with noble aspirations. The marriage of the gentle Amy to the coarse clown not only grieves him because of the broken vows and the loss of the loved one,but it shocks his finer nature.He lays bare the experience in store for her. It is not a case of Beauty and the Beast. Tennyson is more subtle than that.The husband is just clay. Adroitly the poet develops the theme of the finer nature in contact with the gross.One can scarcely read it without wincing. We think of the regrets

and the passing of the years. Drab middle age shows a woman of clay warning a daughter against those "dangerous guides,the feelings.[1]

Mankind in the abstract is a frequent subject with Tennyson, but the lines are often tinged with melancholy. One or two passages,however,are cynical. Through the Byronic heroes the poet can give full rein to this mood. Closely related is the idea of progress sometimes treated with gentle wisdom. But the octogenarian of Locksley Hall inquires ironically:

Is there evil but on earth? Or pain in every peopled sphere?
Well,be grateful for the sounding watchword,"Evolution" here,

Evolution ever climbing after some ideal good,
And Reversion ever dragging evolution in the mud?[2]

The gentle wisdom is better:

Only That which made us meant us to be better by and by,
Set the sphere of all the boundless heavens within the human eye.

Sent the shadow of Himself,the boundles,thro' the human soul,
Boundless inward in the atom,boundless outward in the whole.[3]

Both are better than the didactic:

For nature also cold and warm
And moist and dry devising long,
Through many agents making strong,
Matures the individual form.[4]

This idea of the slowness of human progress opens vistas of history marred by the shames and cruelties of the social system. The review of these ills is deeply pessimistic,lightened now and

1 That the boor turned out well as the later poem shows,has nothing to do with the excellence of the satire.
2 Works,p.522,ll.197-200.
3 Ibid.,p.522,ll.209-212.
4 Ibid.,p.61,ll.37-40.

then by a ray of hope or by grim amusement as the speaker sees himself as "poor old voice of eighty," The pitiless picture of the age is further sketched by the hero of Maud in a vein ranging from satire to invective and from invective to cynicism, through the discussion of the sordidness of peace:

Why do they prate of the blessings of peace? We have made them a curse,
Pickpockets,each hand lusting for all that is not its own;
And lust of gain in the spirit of Cain,is it better or worse
Than the heart of the citizen hissing in war on his own hearthstone?

But these are the days of advance,the works of the men of mind,
When who but a fool would have faith in a tradesman's ware or his word?
Is it peace or war? Civil war as I think,and that of a kind,
The viler as underhand not openly bearing the sword.
. . . . . .
Peace sitting under her olive and slurring the days gone by,
When the poor are hovelled and hustled together,each sex like swine,
When only the ledger lives,and when only not all men lie;
Peace in her vineyard--yes!--but a company forges the wine.

And the vitriol madness flushes up in the ruffian's head,
Till the filthy by-lane rings to the yell of the trampled wife.
And chalk and alum and plaster are sold to the poor for bread,
And the spirit of murder works in the very means of life.[1]

The sword-play here is Juvenalian. The satirist lays on with downright gusto. It is a sad thing to recognize the universal element of his picture. In another passage Tennyson secures his effect through irony. After sixty years the hero of Locksley Hall has no more to say about"the Parliament of man," "the Federation of the world." That was a youthful dream,a pretty picture of man having conquered the tiger madness,the serpent passions,living in an ideal world:

Robed in universal harvest up to either pole she smiles,
Universal ocean softly washing all her warless isles.

1 Works,p.199,ll.21-40.

The impossibility of the picture calls forth an outburst:

Warless? when her tens are thousands and her thousands,millions,then,
All her harvest all too narrow--who can fancy warless men?[1]

It will be interesting to compare the velocity of language and the mood in these selections with a piece of satirical prose on the same subject:

Reflective apologists for war at the present day all take it religiously. it is a sort of sacrament. Its profits are to the vanquished as well as to the victor;and quite apart from any question of profit,it is an absolute good,we are told,for it is human nature at its highest dynamic. Its "horrors" are a cheap price to pay for rescue from the only alternative supposed,of a world of clerks and teachers,of coeducation and zoophily,of consumers leagues and associated charities,of industrialism unlimited and feminism unabashed. No scorn,no hardness,no valor any more! Fie upon such a cattleyard of a planet![2]

We note the genial,tough-minded quality of James. The indignation of Tennyson could scarcely be greater if he were writing of personal wrongs. Both writers heighten the effect by contrast ing peace with war. But we will search far in English literature before we find any writing on the cleansing and enobling power of war which is more persuasive than certain stanzas of Maud.[3]

III

Richard Garnett after essaying a definition of satire observes "It is indeed exceedingly difficult to define the limits between satire and the regions of literary sentiment into which it shades."[4]

1 Works,p.521,ll.167-172.
2 William James,"The Moral Equivalent for War"in Representative Essays in Modern Thought,New York,1913,p.524.
3 Works,p.217,Part III,i,ii,iii,and iv.
4 Encyclopedia Britannica,Ninth Edition,Vol.XXI,p.317.

Hugh Walker in English Satire and Satirists refuses the task of definition except to eliminate mere abuse.[1] Pointing out the wide range in theme and mood,he allows his conception of the boundaries of the type to emerge as he proceeds. This method has been pursued in dealing with the satire of Tennyson.

A comparison of the satire of Juvenal with that of Tennyson in Maud and the Locksley Hall poems reveals that the laughter of the spirit so marked in Chaucer,Dryden,Pope,and Moliere is scarcely present. If it be present,its roots lie deep in that realm from which issued the wisdom of Lear's fool.George Meredith in that lively but puzzling Essay on Comedy seems to exclude even his "thoughtful laughter" from satire unless it be expressed through irony. The satirist has a moral purpose and " "works on a storage of bile." The satiric rod makes the victim "writhe and shriek aloud." The Comic spirit differs from satire in not "driving sharply into the quivering sensibilities." The possession of the Comic Spirit spares one the "pain of satirical heat and the bitter craving to strike heavy blows."[2] Notwithstanding Meredith's discrimination against satire in favor of the Comic Spirit,[3] many readers find literary pleasure even in the Juvenalian type of satire,and it is a reasonable deduction from analysis of the experience that

1 Hugh Walker,op.cit.,p.2.
2 Meredith,op.cit.,pp.72-85.
3 By the Comic Spirit Meredith does not mean humor as distinct from satire and irony. He means--if anyone can understand him--something more comprehensive,but more sunny and tolerant. "The Comic Spirit is the perceptive, the governing spirit, awakening and giving aid to these powers of laughter,but it is not to be confounded with them:it enfolds a thinner form of them,differing from satire in not driving sharply into the sensibilities, and from humor in not comforting them and tucking them up."p.74.

this pleasure if not due to the laughter of the spirit,is due to the thrill of attack and the skillful use of language. it is good to see the arrow hit the bull's eye. If the object of attack be an evil,the experience is accompanied by pleasurable indignation.

Just so with the satire of Tennyson in these three poems. It is true that he lacks that urbanity which Horace insisted should belong to the genre. Moliere in his most bitter attacks has a self-mastery that Tennyson does not have. But it must be remembered that Tennyson has given himself free rein by speaking through fictitious persons who are acting in character. It is not necessary to claim originality for his ideas. What we need is audacity and fitness of expression and that we have. His mood ranges from that of pure satire to irony and cynicism, passing as his temperature rises,into invective. He often creates the memorable phrase:

> When only the ledger lives
>
> Something better than his dog,
> a little dearer than his horse.
>
> A twilight conscience,lighted through the chinks.
>
> The red fool fury of the Seine.
>
> Unfurnished brows,tempestuous tongues.

He can deal with nuances of the spirit as in the picture of the gentle maiden married to the boor. He can be cannily persuasive as in the stanzas on peace and war. He can call to the service

of poetry stark realism and the grotesque. He can achieve an acerbity that is not morbid. It is doubtful whether the ideas Tennyson has presented in these poems could in prose, outside of fiction or drama, rise much above the journalistic tone. In satiric poetry they have permanent value and may be counted on to give a tonic pleasure of the bitter when we have had too much sweet.

CHAPTER NINE

THE IMAGINATIVE TREATMENT OF IDEAS

I

In his studies of the imagination Ruskin distinguishes between the work which merely arouses the imagination of the beholder and that which results from the creative imagination of the artist. He points out that although great art nearly always does awaken the imagination, yet this may be done by works that are not imaginative at all. The special virtue of the imagination he finds "in its reaching by intuition and intensity of gaze a more essential truth that is seen at the surface of things." Ruskin is not only eloquent on this subject but informing. This penetrating, possession-taking faculty he declares to be the highest intellectual power of man. It is a power that

> cuts down to the root and drinks the vital sap of that it deals with; once there, it is at liberty to throw up what new shoots it will, so always that the true juice and sap be in them. and to prune and twist them at its pleasure and bring them to fairer fruit than grew on the old tree.

This penetrating insight and enrichment of the creative imagination are illustrated by the classical monologues of Tennyson. He grasps the central truth of the Greek myth and gives it back with all the beauty and precision of antiquity plus the color

John Ruskin, Modern Painters, Vol. II, pp. 291-359.

of the romantic temper, throwing back upon the story the accumulated reflections and greater contemplative power of a world that has grown older.

Tennyson's love of the classics as evinced by the Ode to Virgil, Frater Ave atque Vale, and the translations from the Iliad, together with his technical knowledge of them, enabled him to attain this mastery. "He was sitting with an Iliad on his knee."[1] "Thus a portable copy of Homer... he had in his hands on our Cornish journey and kept sitting down to read."[2] "After reading aloud the tender Theocritan Idyll, Hylas, he ended with that half-involuntary sigh of delight which breaks forth when a sympathetic spirit closes or turns from some masterpiece of perfect art in words or color. 'I should be content to die,' said the author of ...In Memoriam, 'If I had written anything equal to this.'"[3] "One evening in that upper room... he read out offhand Pindar's great picture of the life of Heaven, into pure, modern prose, splendidly lucid and musical."[4] Such expressions are not infrequent in the Memoir. This love he perpetuated in the dramatic legends of the antique world for which his readers are his debtors.

The dominant thought of each myth is of philosophical proportions. In Ulysses we have nothing less than the Faustian spirit of unresting aspiration which characterizes Western Civilization. Tithonus calls us to consider the dilemma presented

[1] Memoir, Vol.II, p.419.
[2] Ibid., p.499.
[3] Ibid., p.495.
[4] Ibid., p.499.

by immortality. Tiresias would persuade us how sweet and pleasant it is to die for one's country. Oenone pictures the dissension in the heart of man produced by ambition for power, knowledge, or love. The theme of Demeter and Persephone is less easily formulated. It may be a simple prototype of human love, or the companion piece to the Promethean story with its hints of a god's love for man; it may be a portrayal of the primordial earth-spirit which rejoices in the recurring spring, and the fruitful fields.

These myths have been imaginatively understood and imaginatively rendered by Tennyson to a later age and enriched by secondary meanings. Above all the primary meaning is brought to the surface of the modern consciousness where it assumes a deeper significance.

Of the intuitive perception of the creative imagination and its power to send out new shoots from the old trunk, Ulysses is the best example. Dante had already begun the alchemy. The Ulysses of Homer, though not wholly admirable, had the proportions of greatness. He was Intelligence plus the enterprising, resourceful spirit. Dante adds the heroic courage which dares the untried.[1] Tennyson carries the transformation a step farther and he becomes a symbol for the questing spirit of the Western world as

[1]Inferno, Canto xxvi, ll.90-120.

"When I escaped from
From Circe, who beyond a circling year
Had held me near Caieta by her charms,
Ere yet Aeneas yet had named the shore,
Nor fondness for my son, nor reverence
Of my old father nor return of love
That should have crowned Penelope with joy,
Could overcome in me the zeal I had
T'explore the world and search the ways of life,
Man's evil and his virtue. Forth I sailed
Into the deep illimitable main,
With but one bark and the small faithful band,
That yet cleaved to me. As Iberia far,
Far as Morocco, either shore I saw,
And the Sardinian and each isle beside
Which round that ocean bathes. Tardy with age
Were I and my companions when we came
To the strait pass where Hercules ordained
The boundaries not to be o'erstepped by man.
By walls of Seville to my right I left,
On the other hand already Ceuta passed.
'Oh brothers, I began, "who to the West
Through perils without number now have reached
To this the short remaining watch that yet
Our senses have to wake, refuse not proof
Of the unpeopled world, following the track
of Phoebus.' Called to mind whence we sprang:
'Ye were not formed to live the life of brutes,
But virtue to pursue and knowledge high.'
With these few words I sharpened for the voyage
The mind of my associates, that I then
Could scarcely have withheld them."'

contrasted with the "wise passivity" which characterizes the East. Like Faust, avid of experience, he is ever roaming with a hungry heart. The character has now come full circle. No matter what he does or what the events of the story, he is in himself a fascinating, electric figure. Filaments of power radiate from him. He brings to focus the eager restlessness, the noble discontent of the Nordic race. He is too dynamic to be Greek. The great figures, Agamemmnon, Oedipus, Orestes, in spite of tremendous indwelling force, are power played upon by the gods. But Tennyson's Ulysses represents the free power which dares the fates and defies the fell clutch of circumstance to arrest its adventures. Having once definitely conceived him and, as it were in his mind written his biography, the poet has little to do but to let him go. He will speak and act in character. The primary meaning becomes clear. Secondary meanings emerge. F. T. Palgrave in speaking of Tennyson's power to choose the inevitable word, refers to "The subtle allusive touches by which a secondary image is suggested to enrich the leading thought as the harmonic partials give richness to the note struck upon the string."[1] What Palgrave has said of secondary images might be applied to the secondary meanings of Ulysses. These ideas are relevant. They seem an organic part of the central conception. If he cannot rest from travel, it is because he will drink life to the lees. If he sail beyond the sunset, it is to follow knowledge beyond the utmost bounds of human thought. If he has enjoyed greatly and greatly suffered, he has, therefore left an abiding influence

[1]Memoir, Vol.II,p.507.

wherever he has passed, and for all these reasons his spirit contrasts with that of those who sleep and feed and hoard, and even with that of the good Telemechus centered in the sphere of common duties.

Although the essence of poetry is concreteness, this flame-white power working upon abstract thought can render it poetic. In the rich but chaste setting, these ideas seem like isolated jewels. "Life piled on life were all too little," "How dull to pause," "To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield," Bare statements of fact are freighted with significance: "He works his work, I mine," and "I am a part of all that I have met," and

> It may be that the gulfs will wash us down,
> It may be that we shall touch the happy isles.[1]

An idea which is particularly Tennysonian

> by slow prudence to make mild
> A rugged people and through soft degrees
> Subdue them to the useful and the good.[2]

fits in perfectly with the context. Images bear their weight in thought:

> Yet all experience is an arch wherethro'
> Gleams that untravelled world whose margin fades
> For ever and for ever when I move.[3]

The very epithets and verbs are laden with meaning: "this still

[1] Works, p.89,11.62-63.
[2] Ibid., p.88,11.37-40.
[3] Ibid., p.88,11.18-20.

hearth," "these barren crags," "mete and dole," "hoard and sleep and feed," "the eternal silence." In addition the poem is packed with metaphor and picture which lie outside the province of this comment.

And yet, in spite of this richness, it is somehow Greek. There are references to the household gods; to Ulysses the grave closes all; the setting is as full of the breath of the salt sea as the Odyssey; the wealth of ideas in no way interferes with the utmost economy of language, the clear completeness of the whole.

Less dynamic but distinctly Greek in its central conception is Tithonus, The romantic profusion at one or two points breaks in upon the restraint and austere beauty. The aftermath of thought evoked by the poem is considerable. Eternity would be long, we think. Could the youthful heart outstay endless duration? Thus projecting ourselves into that timeless realm we think of "happy men that have the power to die"[1] and wonder with Tithonus why he should desire in any way "To vary from the kindly race of men." Ideas which were especially Tennysonian appear in these monologues but so fused are they with the central conception that they seem inevitable. For example, in Oenone, "self-knowledge, self-reverence and self-control"[2] seems to be modern. But on second thought we assign the first to Socrates who enjoined "Know thyself." The last seems akin to the symmetria prisca

[1] Works, p.90,l.69.
[2] Ibid., p.89,l.29.

and to the conception, "nothing in excess." Likewise in Tiresias the passage:

> My warning that the tyranny of one
> Was prelude to the tyranny of all.
> My counsel that the tyranny of all
> Led backward to the tyranny of one[1]

may on first thought appear as a bit of Tennysonian preachment, but it grows naturally out of the curse that Tiresias shall never be believed. As for its content, it is simply Plato's theory of the three cycles in the forms of government.

In Demeter and Persephone, Tennyson has not, so far as the intellectual element is concerned, availed himself of the possibilities of the myth. He has preferred to center on the story of mother and daughter. Were it not so exquisitely beautiful, one would be inclined to say the poet has lowered the tone of the myth somewhat by making the goddess seem too identical with the human mother. Hallam Tennyson tells us that his father considered Demeter the noblest type of womanhood.[2] In Tiresias, Athena is an image of lovely womanhood. Well, now. This womanhood business does not have the true juice and sap that Ruskin had in mind. In spite of the pecadilloes of their gods, the Greeks never forgot that they were deities. But after all, the flaw is slight, whereas in The Death of Oenone, the introduction of the marriage idea, so foreign to the spirit of the myth, disfigures a poem which in style, at least, is an almost perfect

[1] Works, p.490, ll.72-75.
[2] Memoir,

example of the classic manner. Justifiable is the "new shoot" Tennyson throws out when Demeter, brooding on the Fate beyond the Fates, divines that there may yet be

> younger kindlier gods to bear us down
> As we bore down the gods before us, Gods
> To quench, not hurl the thunderbolt, to stay,
> Not spread the plague, the famine; Gods, indeed,
> To send the moon into the night and break
> The sunless halls of Hades into Heaven,[1]

Thus the static heaven on Olympus takes on the fluent, prophetic cycles of a universe of change,--change which advances in a spiral toward the highest. The identical thought appears in the Hyperion of Keats. There Oceanus reminds the older dynasty of gods that they fall by course of Nature's law, not merely by the force of Jove's thunderbolt:

> As Heaven and Earth are fairer, fairer far
> Than Chaos and blank Darkness, though once chief,
> And as we show beyond that Heaven and Earth,
> In form and shape compact and beautiful,
> In will, in action free, companionship,
> And thousand other signs of purer life;
> So on our heels a fresh perfection treads,
> A power more strong in beauty, born of us
> And fated to excel us as we pass
> In glory that old Darkness.[2]

Here Keats is less poetical than Tennyson because less simple and concrete. It is as characteristic of Keats to think of the new perfection in terms of beauty as for Tennyson to emphasize light and beneficence.

[1] Works, p.530, ll.128-133.
[2] John Keats, Poems, Hyperion, p.278, Everyman.

The conception of the quiet gods of the Epicurean ideal receives perfect expression again and again:

> men in power
> Only are likest gods who have attained
> Rest in a happy place and quiet seats
> Above the thunder, with undying bliss
> In knowledge of their own supremacy.[1]

> those who far aloof
> From envy, hate and pity, and spite and scorn,
> Live the great life which all our greatest fain
> Would follow, centered in eternal calm.[2]

The conception, however, takes a distinctly modern turn in the revulsion of feeling which Demeter expresses:

> Then I, Earth-Goddess curst the Gods of Heaven.
> I would not mingle with their feasts; to me
> Their nectar smacked of hemlock on the lips,
> Their rich ambrosia tasted aconite.
> The man that only lives and loves an hour
> Seemed nobler than their hard eternities.[3]

More modern still and passing into a pessimism worthy of Thomas Hardy for the pathos of the human scene in contrast with the indifference of the gods is the passage in the Lotos-Eaters where the reader is enabled to look down from Olympian heights on

> Blight and famine, plague and earthquake
> roaring deeps and fiery sands,
> Clanging fights and flaming towns and
> sinking ships and praying hands.[4]

[1] Works, p.40, ll.127-131.
[2] Ibid.,
[3] Ibid., p.529, ll.99-105.
[4] Ibid., p.52, ll.124-127.

As might be expected the earliest treatment of Greek myth, in the Lotos-Eaters, shows the exuberance of Tennyson's imagery and the melody of the early period. Tiresias, published in 1885, contains most thought, but it is thought subordinated to the laws of poetic composition. The poet's detachment is remarkable. If he could not reach the highest quality in dramas for the stage, he has in these superb monologues. Myth-makers build better than they know. All that Tennyson has made of these stories was potential in them. In his re-telling they are so shaped in beauty, so Greek in spirit in spite of the deepened conception and the richer imagery, that we are apt to forget the weight of idea which they contain.

II

Tennyson was the poet par excellence of the scientific discoveries and hypotheses of the nineteenth century. One of his biographers observes that whereas Wordsworth

> drew strong fortifications around the province of poetry and feared the invasion of science as he might have feared the attack of a relentless foe, Tennyson boldly crossed the frontier and annexed forever the province of science to the domains of poetry.[1]

The boyish prediction that

> All the intricate and labyrinthine veins
> Of the great vine of Fable, which, outspread
> With growth and shadowing leaf and clusters rare,
> Reacheth to every corner under heaven,
> Deep-rooted in the soil of truth;
> So that men's hopes and fears take refuge in
> The fragrance of its complicated glooms
> And cool impleached twilights[2]

[1] A.C. Benson, Alfred Tennyson, pp.83-84.
[2] Works, p.780, 11.

would have to be surrendered to the keen discoveries of science, he was himself to disprove. From early childhood he had been interested in plant and animal life. With him,as we have seen, astronomy was a passion. The list of scientific books which he read is for one of so marked an artistic bent,surprising. His attitude toward the new science was liberal. He was interested and bound to know the truth. It is not surprising,then, that references to the new knowledge should appear in his poetry.

His success as an interpreter in terms of man's life of the new ideas arising from Darwin's investigations and other scientific advances will be more apparent if we take a glance at another period in which poets celebrated in verse the arrival of a new science. To Akenside,Young,Pope,and Thompson,their age seemed as great a scientific age as does ours to us. Comparatively recent were the discoveries of Harvey,Keplar,and Newton. Then there were the activities of the Royal Society. Their mood was exultant and full of wonder. But in the main their wonder fitted into the teleology of the orthodox faith or at the worst into the natural religion of the Deists. Their aim was frankly didactic. Needless to say,the results were scarcely literature; nor did they add greatly to the reader's knowledge of science. What they did was to write copious iambics in praise of a Creator who had designed so marvellous a universe. They listed the new wonders. Their facts were physiological,biological,geological, astronomical as the case might be. Philosophical reflections followed. These versified treatises are long-winded and filled with religiosity;they bristle with scientific detail. "I do set my bow in the cloud,and it shall be for a token," wrote one

poet. Another:

> There was an awful rainbow once in heaven:
> We know her woof,her texture.[1]

But it remains for Akenside to give the details:

> The hand of science pointed out the path
> In which the Sunbeams gleaming from the West
> Fall on the watery cloud whose darksome veil
> Involves the orient; and that trickling shower
> Piercing through every crystalline convex
> Of clustering dewdrops to their flight opposed,
> Recoil at length,where,concave all behind,
> The internal surface of each glossy orb
> Repels their forward passage into air;
> That thence direct they seek the radiant goal
> From which their course began; and as they strike
> In different lines the gazer's obvious eye,
> Assume a different luster throughout the brede
> Of colors,changing from the splendid rose
> To the pale violet's dejected hue. [2]

Thus Young cogitates on the nature of matter:

> Whence Earth and these bright orbs?--Eternal too?
> Grant matter was eternal; still these orbs
> Would want some other father; much design
> Is seen in all their motions,all their makes;
> Design implies intelligence,and art;
> That can't be from themselves--or man; that art
> Man scarce can comprehend,can man bestow?
> . . . . . .
> Has matter innate motion? Then each atom
> Asserting its indisputable right to dance
> Would form a universe of dust.
> Has matter more than motion? Has it thought?
> Judgment and genius? Is it deeply learned
> In mathematics? [3]

These "anfractuosities" of Young's mind doubtless have a bearing on the history of physico-chemistry. Likewise on

1 John Keats,Poems,Everyman,Lamia,p.148.
2 Mark Akenside,The Pleasures of the Imagination,p.26.
3 Edward Young,Poetical Works,Night Thoughts,pp.268-269.

the history of poetry. What Akenside has done in the passage is to attempt the explanation of scientific facts which would require clear prose,pictures and graphs. Young tries by purely intellectual process to arrive at the nature of matter,and is naive enough to suppose that a narrative of these rational machinations will be poetry if he can only swing it into meter. These poets are not without knowledge of the distances of stellar space,the mysteries of the atom,the rudiments of psychology. They have an inkling of evolution as the law of physical development as well as the law of the progress of truth:

> The same paternal hand
> From the mute shell-fish gasping on the shore,
> To men,to angels,to celestial minds,
> Will ever lead the generations on
> Through higher scenes of being;while supplied
> From day to day by his enlivening breath,
> Inferior orders in succession rise
> To fill the void below.[1]

A favorite theme is the proof of the existence of God from the evidence of design. The problem of evil is touched on in the manner of the Deists of whom Pope was the half unconscious poet. Now and then one comes to a really poetic passage,but on the whole the expression is either grandiose or commonplace.

1 Mark Akenside,op.cit.,p.114. Emerson's pre-Darwinian presentment of the development theory is better poetry because it is more simple and concrete:

> A subtle chain of countless rings
> The next unto the farthest brings;
> The eye reads omens where it goes,
> And speaks all languages the rose;
> And striving to be man,the worm
> Mounts through all the spires of form.
> Poetical Works. Nature.

To understand why Tennyson and his successors in this field, Meredith, Noyes, and Masefield, to mention only the great names, succeeded where the writers of the eighteenth century failed, two facts must be considered. Never since the Copernican theory had been made public, had the advance of science been so disconcerting to orthodoxy as in the age of Tennyson. The new geology, the new biology, the new astronomy produced in the minds of men a sad bewilderment, seeming to strike at the roots of faith, leaving man a helpless atom in a mechanized universe. Typical expressions of this mood can be found in Victorian prose. Carlyle feels the pathos and mystery of mankind:

> Thus like some wild-flaming, wild-thundering train of Heaven's Artillery does this mysterious mankind thunder and flame in long-drawn, quick-succeeding grandeur through the unknown deep. Thus like a God-created, fire-breathing Spirit-Host we emerge from the Inane; haste stormfully across the astonished earth; then plunge again into the Inane.[1]

Filled with admiration for man is Stevenson, but the cosmos staggers him:

> Of the Kosmos in the last resort, science reports many things, and all of them appalling. There seems no substance to this solid globe on which we stamp--nothing but symbols and ratios. Symbols and ratios carry us and bring us forth and beat us down; Gravity that swings the incommensurable suns and worlds through space is but a figment that varies inversely as the squares of distances...Consideration dares not dwell on this view; that way madness lies; science carries us into zones of speculation where there is no habitable city for the mind of man.[2]

1 "Natural Supernaturalism," Sartor Resartus, p.242.
2 Works, University Edition, Vol.X, "Pulvis et Umbra," p.595.

Pater would meet the situation with a refinement of the Epicurean philosophy:

> While all melts under our feet,we may well catch at any exquisite passion,or any contribution to knowledge that seems by a lifted horizon to set the spirit free.[1]

Sadest of all is Newman who finds no solution for the sorrows of man except in an authoritative religion:

> To consider the world in its length and breadth,its various history,the many races of man,their starts,their fortunes, their mutual alienation,their conflicts...and then their enterprises,their aimless courses,their random achievements and acquirements;the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts, the tokens,so faint and broken of a superintending design,the blind evolution of what turn out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things as if from unreasoning elements,not toward final causes;the greatness and littleness of man,his far-reaching aims,his short duration,the curtain hung over his futurity;the disappointments of life,the defeat of good,the success of evil,physical pain,mental anguish--all this is a vision to dizzy and appall.and afflict the mind with the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution.[2]

Significant of the conflict is the conclusion of Huxley which in spite of his cheerful acceptance of the universe,is nevertheless tinged with defeat as he speaks of

> the conviction which has grown with my growth and strengthened with my strength that there is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of thought and action,and the resolute facing of the world as it is when the garment of make-believe by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features, is stripped off.[3]

1 Walter Pater,"Conclusion" in Studies in the History of the Renaissance,Modern Library,p.197

2 John Henry Newman,"Position of My Mind Since 1845," in Apologia pro Vita Sua.

3 Thomas Henry Huxley,Autobiography.

To Matthew Arnold it seemed that man would have to find in poetry his consolation. For:

> There is not a creed which is not shaken,not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable,not a received tradition which doesnot threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized in the fact...and now the fact is failing. But for poetry,the idea is everything:the rest is a world of illusion,of divine illusion.

This prose is a reflection of what poetry could do and a hint of the tone it could take. It is not the minutiae of scientific fact nor teleological arguments,nor rationalized deductions concerning immortality spread before the intellect,which will make great poetry. It is the dilemma of mankind in this pitiless universe. Out of a surcharged heart the poet will speak. And if prose which reflects this theme can rise to imaginative heights,poetry can rise higher.

The Victorian poets,them,succeeded in writing good poetry based on science because of the nature of the new science. A second reason why they succeeded was that they had greater genius than the eighteenth century poets. And they wrote in a different mood. Tennyson was neither cocksure nor voluble. With the utmost simplicity,he assumed the facts and from the depth of his own troubled spirit he wrote,finding relief for his perplexities in poetic expression.

As the poet of evolution he had no predecessor and among his contemporaries no equal. His interest in science kept him informed,and his liberal attitude led him to accept the new findings of investigators in the various fields.Pre-Darwinian evolution was in the air,and Tennyson had more than the average

1 "The Study of Poetry."Essays in Criticism,Second Series,p.1.

layman's knowledge of it. The references to the development theory in In Memoriam, published nine years before the Origin of Species appeared are not extensive but they are significant. That Nature is so careful of the type and so careless of the single life induces the darkness of soul which comes when first we find our world unintelligible. To Tennyson it was an unwelcome thought because it seemed at war with the immortal hope. What Tennyson thought, however, is not the concern here, but rather his ability to make available through poetry the new knowledge. In this first expression of the fact of evolution he has coined a phrase which has finality as if the thing had been said for all time. And so throughout his poetry we see that he looked upon physical knowledge with the eyes of a poet. Subsidiary interpretations of evolution sprang from the conflict between doubt and hope. The idea of beneficent change, so poetical, in itself that one of the earliest expressions of it by Heraclitus was in the form of gnomic poetry, came to Tennyson early:

> We sleep and wake and sleep, but all things move;
> The sun flies forward to his brother sun;
> The dark earth follows wheeled in her eclipse;
> And human things returning on themselves
> Move onward, leading up the golden year.[1]

From this expression in 1842 to The Dreamer in his last volume with its refrain, "Whirl and follow the sun,"[2] the idea occurs again and again, a frequently quoted passage being

> Let the great world spin forever
> Down the ringing grooves of change.[3]

1 Works, The Golden Year, p.87, ll.22-25.
2 Ibid., p.865.
3 Ibid., p.94, ll.183-185.

These anticipations of the theory together with the full knowledge which came with the publication of the Origin of Species, Tennyson viewed in their far-reaching significance.

Another turn which the new knowledge took in his mind was the conception of the evolution of the soul. Great poetry has always been daring;and this quality is marked in Tennyson's poetry of science. He is willing to begin with the brute:

> The Lord let the house of a brute to the soul of a man,
> And the man said, "Am I your debtor?"
> And the Lord--"Not yet; but make it as clean as you can,
> And then I will let you a better."[1]

The image of the beast in man he has put to good use:

> Arise and fly
> The reeling Faun,the sensual feast;
> Move upward working out the beast
> And let the ape and tiger die.[2]

Tennyson was willing to carry the conception of the evolution of the soul to its ultimate conclusion. One great difference between the thinking of the Victorians and that of the twentieth century is that the former was based on belief in the perfectibility of man. What with the World War,with our better knowledge of psychology,with the picture of the world today,and what with Spengler's Decline of the West,and kindred literature of despair,we are considerably shaken on this point. An increasing number begin to fear with one of the younger thinkers that "an actual human maturity is problematic."[3]But the former idea gave Tennyson a great theme. We are far from the noon of man;the thoughts of men are widened

1 Works,By an Evolutionist,p.554.
2 Ibid.p. 193,In Memoriam,CXVIII.
3 Joseph Wood Krutch,The Modern Temper.

with the process of the suns,all moves toward one far off divine event.

> Man as yet is being made,and ere the crowning age of ages,
> Shall not aeon after aeon pass and touch him into shape?
> All about him shadow still,but while the races flower and fade,
> Prophet eyes may catch a glory slowly gaining on the shade.[1]

with something of the lyric melody of his youth he sings of the earth and man in endless cycles of advance:

> He is racing from heaven to heaven
> And less will be lost than won,
> All's well that ends well
> Whirl and follow the sun.[2]

Reflecting on the unfolding of the spring,he sees Nature's method:

> Larger and fuller like the human mind!
> Thy scope of operation day by day
> Thy warmth from bud to bud
> Accomplish that blind model in the seed,
> And men have hopes which race the restless blood,
> That after many changes may succeed
> Life that is Life indeed[3]

III

The grandeur of Tennyson's conception of evolution is equalled by that awakened by the new astronomy. As a poet of space,time and the cosmic scene he has not given us anything equal to Milton's fall of Lucifer or the flight of Satan through chaos,or the skyey ranks of hierarchies of Dante's Paradise.

1 Works,The Making of Man,p.865.
2 Ibid.,The Dreamer,p.865.
3 Ibid.,The Progress of Spring,p.804.

Nor has he anywhere the sense of distance that Hardy gives in The Dynasts as the heavenly spirits look down upon the pigmy battles of earth. but he has written some fine passages in this vein. These passages flash out illuminating his thought about life,death,the self,immortality. But he finds time in the earthly sense worthy of song and reflection. The only humorous passage in In Memoriam takes a leap to the far-off day when his poems after the waning of a thousand moons shall be "foreshortened in the tract of time,"and serve to curl a maiden's hair.[1] One of the early poems suppressed has a magnificent stanza,an apostrophe to time considered in the earthly sense and closing with the thought of the history of man:

> An undistinguishable waste
> Invisible to the human eyes,
> Which fain would scan the various shapes that glide
> In dusky cavalcade
> Imperfectly descried
> Through that intense,impenetrable shade.[2]

Sidereal time fascinated him;aeons before the molding of earth, aeons when the planet will swing manless and forlorn. The sense of infinite time is suggested dimly in the descriptions of the nebular hypothesis with the added sublimities of chaos and space:

> This world was once a fluid haze of light,
> Till,toward the center set the starry tides,
> And eddied into suns that,wheeling cast
> The planets; then the monster,then the man;
> Tattooed or woaded,winter-clad in skins,
> Raw from the prime and crushing down his mate. [3]

1 Works,In Memoriam,LXXVII.
2 Ibid.,p.767.
3 Ibid.,p.124,ll.101-106.

To give a sense of the cataclysmic crashing in chaos when worlds are in process of formation is a real test of a poet's power over language. More than once Tennyson has done this superbly. He has made language pliant and adequate for such difficult thought in the following passage from Lucretius:

> A void was made in Nature;all her bonds
> Cracked; and I saw the flaring atom-streams
> And torrents of her myriad universe
> Ruining along the illimitable inane,
> Fly on to clash together again and make
> Another and another frame of things
> Forever.[1]

Difficult,too, is the picture of man in the grip of cosmic forces. Tennyson puts himself completely into the consciousness of the Roman poet-philosopher,banishing every trace of Christian symbolism as he pictures the vanishing of man:

> But till this cosmic order everywhere
> Shattered into one earthquake in one day
> Cracks all to pieces--and that hour perhaps
> Is not so far when momentary man
> Shall seem no more a something to himself,
> But he whose hopes and hates,his homes and fanes,
> And even his bones long laid within the grave,
> The very sides of the grave shall pass,
> Vanishing,atom and void,atom and void,
> Into the unseen forever.[2]

Here we have a terrible beauty arising from the majesty of the theme and the sublimation of word and idea to poetic ends. Equally informed with awe but lightened by a great belief is a passage in Sea Dreams. The cosmic imagery is transferred to earth. But the cyclic convulsions of the Lucretian passages have given place to the recurring waves of the progress

1 Works,p.275,ll.37-43.
2 Ibid.,p.278,ll.249-258.

and regression of human history. Full realization on the part of the reader calls for effort. In this poem a woman dreams that she sees a wave swelling and breaking on a line of cliffs to a low music which rises and dies. The cliffs turn out to be cathedrals representing the religions of the world, and the music is the universal constant which remains as religions come and go.

> Ever when it broke,
> The statue, king, or saint, or founder fell;
> Then from the gaps and chasms of ruin left,
> Came men and women in dark clusters round,
> Some crying, "Set them up! They shall not fall!"
> And others, "Let them lie, for they have fallen."
> And still they strove and wrangled; and she grieved
> In her strange dream, she knew not why, to find
> Their wildest wailing never out of tune
> With that sweet note. [1]

This is great poetry and the highwater mark of Tennyson's power to communicate--that is to share with the reader through emotional and imaginative realization, a great idea. The style is interesting. In the complete passage of twenty lines the vagueness and sublimity of the sidereal spaces and activities are suggested in the world of man. In these extracts the poet has almost given form to the inexpressible.

IV

But the contemplation of vastness also awakens emotions and ideas of a very different sort. "What is man that thou art mindful of him?" we cry. By reflection a mood can easily be induced in which we feel it highly improbable that the Nameless is conscious of a creature so infinitesimal, so

1 Works, p.255, ll.216-225.

apparently accidental in the scheme of things. Pessimism follows. This mood was often expressed by Tennyson. In some respects he is the most all-round and sane exponent of pessimism among the English poets. The gloom of Hardy is too unrelieved. Even Masefield is too depressing. Tennyson puts the case well, with a heartening presumption in favor of optimism. Whether he was a pessimist or not is not the concern of this study, though a good case could be made of the view that he was, and that in his hopeful solutions to the problems he raises, he was whistling to keep his courage up. However that may be, he has represented the usual phases of this mood. In this he has rendered a service. For poetry must express all the heart of man. If there be unbelief, gloom, despair-- in these realms, also, deep must answer unto deep. Tennyson was not without a critical notion of the value of pessimistic utterance. In the literary squabble with Bulwer-Lytton, Tennyson's reply recognizes the power of Shakespeare's misanthrope, Timon of Athens:

> We know him, out of Shakespeare's art,
> And those fine curses which he spoke;
> The old Timon with his noble heart,
> That, strongly loathing, greatly broke.[1]

Themes are never wanting to be the poet of dark thoughts. Man's inhumanity to man, alone, is a fertile field. The sheer quantity of Tennyson's poetry dealing with the cruelties of the social system and the moral failure of man is so great that quotation can give very little idea of it. The predatory nature of human society, however veneered by civilization, has seldom

[1]Works, p.791.

been put with more naked realism than by the youth in Locksley Hall:

> Slowly comes a hungry people as a lion creeping nigher,
> Glares at one that nods and winks behind a slowly dying fire.[1]

Behind such lines we feel the presence of poet saddened by the spectacle of a world where man lives "to eat and to be eaten." In eleven stanzas of Locksley Hall Sixty Years After he reviews human cruelty from the days when Assyrian Kings flayed their captives and when Timur built a tower of human skulls, to equal cruelties of his own day.[2] His conclusion is scarcely fair, nor is the poetry so good, but there is a power in it. Better is the unsparing picture of the life of the poor in cities with its unforgetable lines:

> Is it well that while re range with Science, glorying in the Time,
> City children soak and blacken soul and sense in city slime?
>
> There among the glooming alleys, Progress halts on palsied feet,
> Crime and hunger cast our maidens by the thousand on the street.
>
> There the master scrimps his haggard sempstress of her daily bread,
> There a single sordid attic holds the living and the dead.
>
> There the smoldering fire of fever creeps across the rotted floor,
> And the crowded couch of incest in the warrens of the poor.[3]

Vastness, a poem of eighteen stanzas, purports to be an argument for the immortality of the soul, but if it be not a terrible arraignment of the human scene, it would be hard to find one.

[1] Works, p.93,ll.135-137.
[2] Ibid., p.519,ll.81-100.
[3] Ibid., p.522,ll.217-224.

It is a survey of both good and evil, but the flavor of the whole may be represented by

> What is it all but a trouble of ants
> in the gleam of a million million of suns?[1]

As a final glimpse of homo sapiens as the poet in his darker mood sees him, we may listen to the hero of Maud:

> Ah, yet we cannot be kind to each other here for an hour,
> We whisper and grin and chuckle, and hint at a brother's shame;
> However we brave it out, we men are a little breed.[2]

> The feeble vassals of wine and anger and lust,
> The little hearts that know not how to forgive.
> Arise, my God and strike, for we hold thee just,
> Strike dead the whole weak race of venomous worms,
> That sting each other here in the dust;
> We are not worthy to live.[3]

These expressions do not represent Tennyson's opinion but are the distorted views of one on the verge of madness. But the aim here is to measure the poet's power to convey an image of the world as it looks to the pessimist.

But the arraignment of mankind does not represent the nadir of gloom. Tennyson had, in fact, got hold of two ideas which are the most paralyzing a human being can entertain. The biological fact which turned him to stone he expressed in a phrase so adequate that it has passed into the fund of common wisdom, "Nature, red in tooth and claw."[4] Unless we divorce God completely from matter, there is yet no answer

1 Works, p.534.
2 Ibid., p.201, ll.126-131.
Ibid., p.212, ll.43-48.
Ibid., In Memoriam, LVI.

to the problem raised by this aspect of nature which will satisfy those who cling to the idea of beneficent design in the universe. If a poet would express adequately this fact to an intelligent human being who has been able to think of pity in a universe where there is no pity,he must use strong words and true. Of these Tennyson finds no lack. He does not often deal with this phase of nature,but when he does,he strikes abruptly into the heart of the matter:

> For Nature is one with rapine,a harm no preacher can heal;
> The May-fly is torn by the swallow,
> the sparrow speared by the shrike,
> And the whole little wood where I sit
> is a world of plunder and prey.[1]

Canto lvi of In Memoriam is a devastating picture of the indifference of Nature. If there be nothing more for man,the poet declares the God who originated such a scheme of things to be a monster:

> Dragons of the prime
> That tare each other in their slime
> Were mellow music matched with him.[2]

The second thought which struck bottom in the soul of Tennyson and never left him was that consciousness is a comparatively recent phenomenon in the universe. All philosophies cheerfully build on the dubious assumption that consciousness is a constant

1 Works,p.201,ll.124-125
2 Ibid.,In Memoriam,LVI. Cf. Masefield:

> Restless and hungry,still it moves and slays
> Feeding its beauty on dead beauty's bones;
> Most merciless in all its million ways,
> Its breath for singing bought by dying groans,
> Roving so far with such a zest to kill.
> Poems and Plays,1920,p.416.

in the universe. When we consider Eddington's view that it is not only recent but transient, paralysis sets in. If we drop to a still lower stage and accept his view that it is confined to this planet, the case is beyond argument. Tennyson, of course did not have to battle with the latter theory. But what he did know makes immortality an essential in religious belief. There is pathos in Tennyson's desire for certainty on this point. It was not so much that he wanted to survive death as that he wanted to justify God. He wanted a God, as someone has observed, who could satisfy his heart without insulting his intelligence. The poetry dealing with this theme is sad in tone with an almost bitter realism of expression:

> Why should we bear with an hour of torture, a moment of pain,
> If every man die for ever, if all his griefs are in vain,
> And the homeless planet at length will be wheeled through
> the silence of space,
> Motherless evermore of an ever-vanishing race,
> When the worm shall have writhed its last
> and its last brother-worm will have fled,
> From the dead fossil skull that is left
> in the rocks of an earth that is dead.[1]

Even in his more hopeful mood the terrible imagery breaks through:

> Thou madest Death; and lo, thy foot
> Is on the skull which thou hast made.[2]

At the lowest ebb of faith Men are only 'the flies of latter spring,' and Time

> a maniac scattering dust,
> And Life a Fury slinging flame.[3]

[1] Works, p.497, ll.81-86.
[2] Ibid., p.163, Prologue to In Memoriam.
[3] Ibid., p.175, Canto L.

The power and terrible beauty of this poetry speak for themselves. And Tennyson's lack of detachment gives pathos to his utterance. Your hard-shelled pessimist puts the case with less feeling. Thus the parable of Bertrand Russell:

> And God smiled; and when he saw that man had become perfect in renunciation and worship, he sent another sun through the sky which crashed into man's sun; and all returned again to nebula. "Yes," he murmured, "it was a good play; I will have it performed again."[1]

Anatole France uses a pleasant irony. "La Vie est une tragedie par un poet excellent."[2]

As a poet of despair Tennyson has written nothing of length. Nor has he written anything so good as the Rubaiyat, The Dynasts, or the Sonnets of Masefield. But Fitzgerald's poem is more pagan than pessimistic. Hardy is occupied mainly with pity of mankind and the indictment of God. Masefield who has, perhaps, written the greatest poetry in this vein, dwells on the pathos and the mystery of life. No one of the three has dealt with the cruelty and futility of man. Tennyson, has therefore, given expression to more aspects of the pessimistic position. He was, however, unfortunate in the form he chose for some of this poetry. The rollicking, galloping meters which he so often used do not lend themselves to the contemplative mood so well as the sonnet, blank verse or the coalescing stanzas of In Memoriam.

[1] A Free Man's Worship in Modern Essays, ed. Christopher Morley, New York, 1921.
[2] Anatole France, Thais, p.129.

The solution of Tennyson and that of Masefield to problems of gloom are the raw material of great poetry. For Masefield, the answer is Beauty and the Self:

> Wherever Beauty has been quick in clay,
> Some affluence of it lives, a spirit dwells,
> Beauty that Death can never take away.[1]
> . . . . . .
> O little Self within whose smallness lies
> All that man was and is and will become.[2]

Tennyson's answer is Love:

> Love is and was my king and lord,
> And will be though as yet I keep
> Within the court on earth and sleep
> Encompassed by his faithful guard,
>
> And hear at times a sentinel
> Who moves about from place to place,
> And whispers to the worlds of space,
> In the deep night that all is well.[3]

V

As a poet of faith, Tennyson in In Memoriam reached rather timid conclusions. But his poetry gains a pensive charm from the lack of certainty. In the Ancient Sage the confidence of the aged prophet is neither so convincing nor so sweetly lyrical as the words upon the scroll. In this poem the author seeks to arrive at answers to the problems of his youthful disciple by rational processes. It seems strange that Tennyson did not rely more upon his mystic experiences for the certainty he craved. These ecstasies or trances he describes in Timbuctoo, Idylls of the King

1 Masefield, op.cit., p.421.
2 Ibid., p.414.
3 In Memoriam, CXXVI

In Memoriam, and in The Ancient Sage. The essence of the experience seems to have been a feeling of the certainty of God and the Self together with the quality of being "unshadowable in words."[1] Whenever in In Memoriam he bases belief on feeling instead of reason, his answer is tender and neautiful:

> If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,
> I heard a voice, "Believe no more,"
> And heard an ever-breaking shore
> That tumbled in the Godless deep,
>
> A warmth within the breast would melt
> The freezing reason's colder part,
> And like a man in wrath the heart
> Stood up and answered, "I have felt."[2]

Likewise in The Higher Pantheism, with the emotional lifting of the thought, the poem which has been intellectual and obscure, becomes clear; through the simplest words a very old philosophy grows moving and beautiful. Emerson got the idea out of Oriental books and put it in the cryptic, repetitious prose of "The Over-Soul." St, Paul, quoting a Greek poet expressed it tersely, "In Him we live and move and have our being." Far better is Tennyson:

> Speak to Him thou for He hears, and Spirit with Spirit can meet
> Closer is He than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.[3]

1 The experience is thus described in The Ancient Sage:

> The mortal limit of the self was loosed,
> And passed into the Nameless as a cloud
> Melts into heaven. I touched my limbs, the limbs
> Were strange, not mine--and yet no shade of doubt,
> But utter clearness and through loss of self
> The gain of such large life as matched with ours
> Were sun to spark--unshadowable in words.
>
> Works, p.500, ll.232-237.

2 Works, p.175.
3 Ibid., p.273.

Other subjects closely related to religion were taken over into the realm of poetry--pre-existence,the nature of the self, mysticism,impersonal immortality,the mystery of life,the unity of beliefs. Needless to say,the poetry on these themes is not all equally good. Tennyson in his masterpiece has even perpetrated the following:

> They might not seem thy prophecies
> But spiritual presentiments
> And such refraction of events
> As often rises ere they rise.[1]

But a lapse like this is rare in the work treated in this chapter. The fact is that from the early poems,The Mystic,and the Supposed Confessions, to the late Akbar's Dream,Tennyson showed skill in handling subject-matter of an intellectual nature. His later poetry has been considered didactic by Walker and Benson.[2] The view held here is that this poetry takes a lower rank because of the natural waning of Tennyson's artistic powers rather than because of didactic aim. Even so,this poetry has vigor,spontaneity and marked originality of conception. Akbar's Dream,for example,though it lacks the fire and music of Tennyson's great period,has a masculine fiber and an austere beauty of its own.

VI

That Tennyson's style was imaginative,metaphorical,suggestive,goes without saying. That he had a rich nature felt deeply and sincerely,was an expert in the technique of poetry are equally obvious. Aside from these qualities,it is not easy to

1 Works,p.186.
2 See Introduction of thesis.

see what else he had which enabled him to render so many difficult subjects poetic. Style being an intangible,we can seldom see the pulse of the machine.

But some things may be observed. He was an eclectic in matters of style. A genius for selection and rejection guided him to the right means for a given effect. And he elected simplicity. Seldom have philosophical ideas been phrased so simply. He seldom indulges in inversions. His diction springs from the happenings,the scenes,the emotions of our commonplace Saturdays and Mondays. He permits the grave form of verbs and pronouns,but little else in the way of poetic diction. His rhymes usually seem inevitable. Idea and garment of language seem to have sprung up simultaneously so that each belongs to the other. The Two Voices illustrates how beauty and ideas may be joined with a minimum of ornament. Thus he presents the possibility of pre-existence:

> Yet how should I for certain hold
> Because my memory is so cold,
> That I first was in human mold?
> . . . . . .
> Moreover something is or seems
> That touches me with mystic gleams
> Like glimpses of forgotten dreams.[1]

The sinister voice would persuade that death ends all:

> Consider well,the voice replied,
> His face that two hours since hath died;
> Wilt thou find passion,pain or pride?
>
> His palms are folded on his breast;
> There is no other thing expressed
> But long disquiet merged in rest.[2]

1 Works,p.32. Ibid.,p34.

In Memoriam contains a passage which expresses man's feeling after God and his various conclusions in four brief lines:

> That which we dare invoke to bless;
> Our dearest faith;our ghastliest doubt;
> He,They,One,All;within,without;
> The power in darkness whom we guess,--[1]

This poem is a treasure-house of echoes of creeds and hypotheses couched in the simplest language.

Other means are used to vitalize truth and leaven fact. Hyperbole is not infrequent. By means of overstatement the poet conveys a higher truth or gives a greater sweep to what might be taken as a matter of course; or he carries truth into the duller medium of the reader's consciousness without loss of energy. Witness the poetical statement of the geological process of erosion:

> The hills are shadows and they flow
> From form to form and nothing stands;
> They melt like mist,the solid lands,
> Like clouds they shape themselves and go.[2]

Another means of quickening thought is through realism and the grotesque. Bagehot considered Tennyson a poet of the ornate,and so he was. But that does not represent the whole truth. This critic should have made a survey of the homely words and scenes which Tennyson thought fit for poetry. In their place he is not too nice to call things by their right names;beast,ape,skull,writhing worm--what his theme calls for,

1 Works,p.194,Canto CXXIV
2 Ibid.,p.194,Canto CXXIII.

that he will use: images, cruel, loathsome, or coarse, come at his call--the rotting limbs of the ascetic, the boor in his drunken sleep, Neanderthal crashing through his jungle.[1]

Tennyson has unusual power in making the abstract poetic. The secondary ideas which cling about the abstraction, the potentials that radiate from it, come upon the reader as Keats would say, "with a fine suddenness;"

> The truths that never can be proved.
>
> O living Will that shall endure.
>
> Our little systems have their day.
>
> And not to lose the good of life.

Even more beautiful and imaginative are those lines of this class which are in no sense truisms:

> The riddle of the painful earth
>
> Ruining through the illimitable inane.
>
> their hard eternities.
>
> Foreshortened in the tract of time.

All these powers taken together help to account for Tennyson's ability to express the nuances of thought. Shy, formless,

1 Cf. In Memoriam, Canto XXXV:

> Mere fellowship of sluggish moods,
> Or in his coarsest Satyr-shape,
> Had bruised the earth and crushed the grape,
> And basked and battened in the woods.

fugitive children of the brain are brought out of the realm of the uncreated and given a habitation and a name. All great poets do this, and Tennyson had an opulent share in the gift as only those know who love In Memoriam, De Profundis, and "Flower in the crannied wall."

If we cannot discover the whole secret of Tennyson's style, it may be due to the fact that anomalies and contradictions rise up to confute our neat generalizations. He uses simple words. But a study of his use of polysyllables in In Memoriam, alone, is a revelation. He is figurative, but he can do without figures. He is the soul of concreteness, but he is also a poet of the abstract. He is at once classic and romantic. If his compression is superb, so is his profusion. His thought is clear and simple, but on occasion he can be vague and intricate. Sometimes he has played the preacher and the schoolmaster. At other times he has so focused his powers upon his art that the intellect has been "released from all service and suffered to take its direction from its own celestial fire."

C O N C L U S I O N

CHAPTER TEN

CONCLUSION

Since a poet of first rank is interested in giving form to beauty rather than in pleasing his public or doing them good,the whole problem of didacticism narrows itself down to the question od detachment. To a great poet freedom of choice as to subject-matter is imperative. If this single-mindedness and freedom be diverted or limited through self-interest or for any other reason,it will be to the detriment of the product. They may be limited through the desire for personal profit, as witness the commercialization of so much of modern literature. Or they may be modified subtly by influences alien to art which operate more or less unconsciously in the mind of the poet. Of these alien influences none is more insidious than the impulse to teach. To this Tennyson sometimes yielded. At other times he triumphed over it because he forgot his public,maintained his detachment,rose to a selfless objectivity.

One cannot arraign Tennyson for didacticism without recalling that Lucretius,Horace,and Dante were great poets who were indubitably didactic. But on reflection it becomes clear that in so far as they were genuine poets,they had this freedom and single-mindedness. There are those who speak disparagingly of inspiration. But inspiration is a good word. Etymologically it means,breathed upon by a god. The work of these didactic

poets was uneven. When theories and philosophies of their day breathed through them these great subjects "seemed to take the pen and write." When this was not the case,they turned out metrical prose. When a poet of genius has this higher objectivity, all other requirements of imagination and emotion,of the organic union of form and content,take care of themselves.

On this basis an effort has been made to understand Tennyson,to see him in his world,to read his poetry without prejudice, in view of the charge of didacticism made by a number of his critics. Tennyson felt the conflict in his own nature between pure art and art for morality's sake,and he lived in an age when this conflict came to a head. He is,therefore,a good subject for a study of the relation between truth and art,morality and art. The following is a summary of the investigation.

Chapter II deals with definitions. Owing to the variety of meanings attached to the terms art,poetry,and especially to the word didactic,certain definitions of these terms have been adopted for this thesis. Art is something shaped by man into satisfying form from a preconceived design. In the fine arts this design is concerned with beauty. Poetry is the artistic expression of the human mind in metrical language or in language which has a sustained rhythmic pattern. Lyric will be applied only to song or to subjective expressions of thought and feeling. Reflective will be the term used to designate the artistic use of ideas in poetry. By didacticism is meant the prostitution of the pure creative impulse to utilitarian aims.

An understanding of the personality and artistic bent of Tennyson being essential before proceeding with the study,

Chapter III deals with this subject and Chapter IV shows what didactic influences were brought to bear upon him. Tennyson had a rich,deep nature showing disharmonic elements. He had the aloofness,independence,and during his first period the single-mindedness which so often characterize great men. He was well stocked with knowledge and ideas concerning the great problems of his age. Artistically his basic quality was precisely that of the landscape artist. To this we must add a gift for the music of words and a devotion to the technique of poetry.

Thus he was by nature an artist pure and simple. And the prevailing influences of his life were such as would tempt him to use his art in the interests of morality and religion.It is not surprising that he sometimes chose unsuitable themes,or that he honestly desired to do good through his poetry,or that he was not always able to leaven the intractable ideas which sometimes seemed to him proper material for poetry.

During his first period from 1827 to 1847 Tennyson's creative impulse flowered with great exuberance; he perfected his technique and experimented with a great variety of subjects and poetic forms. In the second period extending from 1847 to the end of his life in 1892,though he still maintained the temper of the artist,his mind was turned outward more upon the world with the result that he unconsciously became a prophet to his age. Chapter V deals with development. The study leads to the conclusion that neither Tennyson's conventional belief that the poet should be a teacher nor the pressure of external influences hampered his genius. The period is marked by brilliant poetry and by a marked use of the didactic form,allegory,with-

out being didactic. He used satire with success and showed an intellectual advance and a deepening of moral earnestness.

In his second period as spokesman of his world, Tennyson built upon the Past in legend and history; and upon the Present in those poems which dealt with contemporary thought. Chapters VI and VII deal with this aspect of his work. In the poetry based on the Greek myths, we find very little evidence of the didactic spirit. In the four historical dramas, there are some obtrusions of the moral element, but on the whole these dramas show Tennyson in an unusual mood of restraint both as to the use of ornament and homily. Short legends were likewise free from this defect. As much cannot be said for the Idylls of of the King. While he has in the main used allegory with great art in these poems, he has sometimes made the legends the vehicle of Victorian ideals which now seem false or half-true. There is also a lack of consistency due to the author's desire to give a message. There is considerable obtrusion of moral teaching in the form of maxim, platitude and homily. There has been some sacrifice of beauty. The extent of all this is sufficient to mar the poem.

Tennyson wrote good poetry on the problems of his day. But The Princess and the poems of occasion which he wrote after he became Laureate frequently show the preacher and the schoolmaster. An examination of these failures leads to the conclusion that when Tennyson dealt with such problems of expediency or ethics as Woman's rights, war, marriage, imperialism, he produced poetry far from firstrate in quality. It lacked evenness of texture, clearness of design, was sometimes provincial in tone,

given to the homiletic or panegyric strain. In style it sometimes fell to the level of the journalistic.

The purpose of the study of the didacticism of Tennyson is not wholly negative. To point out how far the aim to be a teacher of his age impaired the quality of his work is one aspect of the problem. It is equally important to discover how far he was able to transcend his own tendency and the influences of his circle and age together with the cumulative pressure of his English predecessors and classic example. There are two ways in which a poet can deal with ideas and still be poetic. He can write poetic satire--ideas subjected under the laws of verse and rhythm to the rational process. A second way is to treat thought imaginatively. Chapter VIII deals with Tennyson's satire showing themes, method and quality. Chapter nine deals with his power to lift the intellectual element to the realm of poetry by means of the imagination. Tennyson's poetry of ideas is not all of equal value. But much of it is good, and some of it is great.

The investigation leads to the following conclusions:

1. Tennyson was by nature a pure artist with a sense for visual beauty akin to that of the plastic artist and with an ear for the music of words like that of the musician. By nature he was as free from the impulse to instruct or uplift as the landscape painter or the musician.

2. He was subjected to unusual pressure from those of his own circle, the critics, influential persons of his time, and from the conditions of his age, to use his art in the interest of

national policy, morality, and religion.

3. He sometimes yielded to this pressure, notably in the case of The Princess, the Idylls of the King, and the quasi-official poetry of the Laureateship.

4. The extent of didacticism in these poems is sufficient to make them fall short of that excellence they would otherwise have attained.

5. This didacticism manifested itself in the following ways:

(a) The sacrifice of beauty.

(b) The obtrusion of moral teaching.

(c) Unjustifiable reticence.

(d) Inconsistency due to the desire to give a message.

(e) Inartistic treatment due to wrong choice of subject.

(f) Insincerity due to considering the public.

(g) Overemphasis of Victorian virtues.

(h) Emphasis of ideals which are sentimental, false, or half-true.

(i) The obtrusion of personal views on imperialism and the greatness of England.

6. The didactic element is present to some extent in the dramas and in later poems of science and faith. But the charge that this work contains a great deal of didacticism is not sustained by a close examination of this poetry. The dramas fall short of Tennyson's best work from lack of dramatic skill. The later religious poetry shows a natural decline in Tennyson's artistic powers.

7. Tennyson's didacticism is counterbalanced by notable success in using ideas poetically:

(a) He has conveyed ideas through allegory, a didactic form, with great art.

(b) He has written a great deal of good satire.

(c) He is an excellent poet of science.

(d) As a poet of pessimism he compares favorably with Hardy and Masefield.

(e) He has vitalized the Greek myths by introducing modern thought in keeping with their themes.

(f) In spite of the didacticism of the Idylls of the King, it remains the best treatment of the Arthurian story in English literature.

8. In dealing with speculative thought Tennyson is less prone to didacticism than in dealing with ethical ideas.

9. In dealing with scientific and philosophical thought he has shown a wide range as to themes and versatility as to methods.

If any single idea emerges from this investigation, it is that the intellectual element is a means of enrichment to a poet with genuine gifts--but genuine gifts he must have.

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Mary Evelyn Shipman was born on a farm near Captina Creek, Belmont County, Ohio, September 6, 1887. Her father was Hugh McCoy Shipman, and her mother's maiden name was Adaline Louisa Plummer. After graduating from the High School at Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, she taught in the grade schools of Beaver Falls, Salem, Ohio, and Alliance, Ohio. She received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Mount Union College in 1923 and the degree of Master of Arts from Columbia University in 1926. The year, 1926-1927 was spent in graduate study at the University of Michigan. In February 1928 she entered Boston University and spent there one semester and three summer sessions. From 1920 to 1926 she was Instructor in English at the University of Pittsburgh and from 1928 to 1931, Teacher of English at Asheville Teachers College, Asheville, North Carolina.